The LITTLE COLONEL'S HOUSE PARTY

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ANNIE · FELLOWS JOHNSTON

To
Ronald E. Holder
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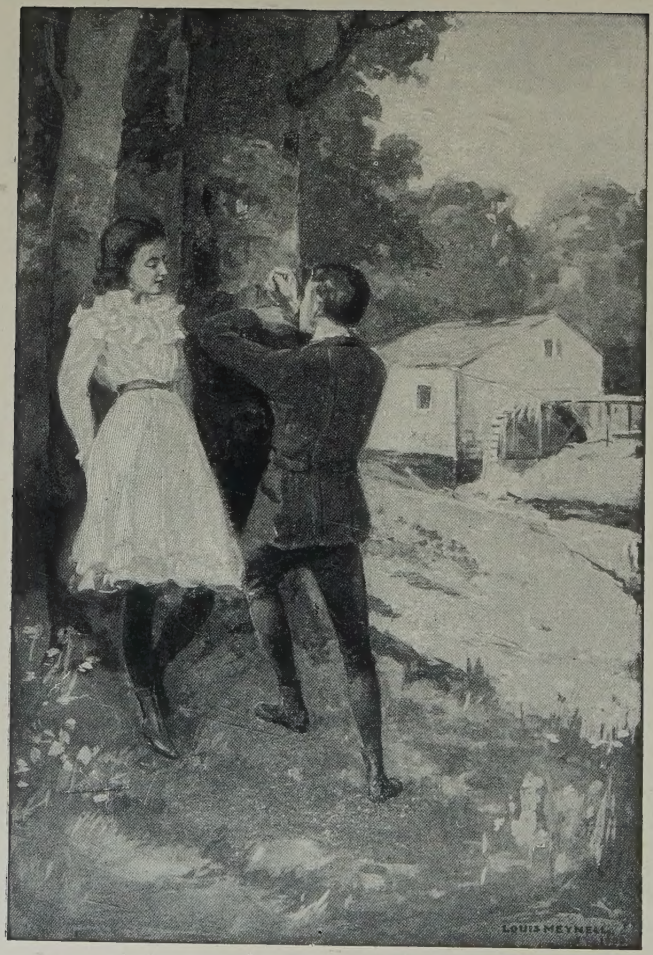

"MALCOLM WENT ON CUTTING."

(See page 137.)

The Little Colonel's House Party

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel," "Two Little Knights of Kentucky," "The Story of Dago," etc.

Illustrated by LOUIS MEYNELL

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THE LITTLE COLONEL'S HOUSE (Trade Mark) PARTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVITATIONS ARE SENT.

Down the long avenue that led from the house to the great entrance gate came the Little Colonel on her pony. It was a sweet, white way that morning, filled with the breath of the locusts; white overhead where the giant trees locked branches to make an arch of bloom nearly a quarter of a mile in length, and white underneath where the fallen blossoms lay like scattered snowflakes along the path.

Everybody in Lloydsboro Valley knew Locust. "It is one of the prettiest places in all Kentucky," they were fond of saying, and every visitor to the Valley was taken past the great entrance gate to admire the long rows of stately old trees, and

the great stone house at the end, whose pillars gleamed white through the Virginia creeper that nearly covered it.

Everybody knew old Colonel Lloyd, too, the owner of the place. He also was often pointed out to the summer visitors. Some people called attention to him because he was an old Confederate soldier who had given his good right arm to the cause he loved, some because they thought he resembled Napoleon, and others because they had some amusing tale to tell of the eccentric things he had said or done.

Nearly every one who pointed out the imposing figure, which was clad always in white duck or linen in the summer, and wrapped in a picturesque military cape in winter, added the remark: "And he is the Little Colonel's grandfather." To be the grandfather of such an attractive little bunch of mischief as Lloyd Sherman was when she first came to the Valley was a distinction of which any man might well be proud, and Colonel Lloyd *was* proud of it. He was proud of the fact that she had inherited his lordly manner, his hot temper, and imperious ways. It pleased him that people had given her his title of Colonel on account of the resemblance to himself. She had outgrown it somewhat since she had first been nicknamed the Little Colonel. Then she was

only a spoiled baby of five; but now his pride in her was even greater, since she had grown into a womanly little maid of eleven. He was proud of her delicate, flower-like beauty, of her dainty ways, and all her little schoolgirl accomplishments.

"She is like those who have gone before," he used to say to himself sometimes, pacing slowly back and forth under the locusts; and the bloom-tipped branches above would nod to each other as if they understood. "Yes-s, yes-s," they whispered in the soft lisping language of the leaves, "*we* know! She's like Amanthis, — sweet-souled and starry-eyed; we were here when you brought her home, a bride. She's like Amanthis! Like Amanthis!"

Under the blossoms rode the Little Colonel, all in white herself this May morning, except the little Napoleon hat of black velvet, set jauntily over her short light hair. Into the cockade she had stuck a spray of locust blossoms, and as she rode slowly along she fastened a bunch of them behind each ear of her pony, whose coat was as soft and black as the velvet of her hat. "Tarbaby" she called him, partly because he was so black, and partly because that was the name of her favourite Uncle Remus story.

"There!" she exclaimed, when the flowers were

fastened to her satisfaction. "Yo' lookin' mighty fine this mawnin', Tarbaby! Maybe I'll take you visitin' aftah I've been to the post-office and mailed these lettahs. You didn't know that Judge Moore's place is open for the summah, did you, and that all the family came out yesta'day? Well, they did, and if Bobby Moore isn't ovah to my house by the time we get back home, we'll go ovah to Bobby's."

As she spoke, she passed through the gate at the end of the avenue and turned into the public road, a wide pike with a railroad track on one side of it and a bridle-path on the other. Two minutes' brisk canter brought her to another gate, one that had been closed all winter, and one that she was greatly interested in, because it led to Judge Moore's house. Judge Moore was Rob's grandfather, and she and Rob had played together every summer since she could remember.

The wide white gate was standing open now, and she drew rein, peering anxiously in. She hoped for the sight of a familiar freckled face or the sound of a welcoming whoop. But it was so still everywhere that all she saw was the squirrels playing hide and seek in the beech-grove around the house, and all she heard was the fearless cry, "Pewee! pewee!" of a little bird perched in a tree overarching the gate.

It balanced itself on the limb, leaning over and cocking its bright bead-like eyes at her, as if admiring the sight.

What it saw was a slender girl of eleven, taller than most children of that age, and more graceful. There was a colour in her cheek like the delicate pink of a wild rose, and the big hazel eyes had a roguish twinkle in them, as they looked out fearlessly on the world from under the little Napoleon hat with its nodding cockade of locust blossoms.

"There's nobody in sight, Tarbaby," said the Little Colonel, "and there isn't time to go in befo' we've been to the post-office, so we might as well be travellin' on."

She was turning slowly away when down the pike behind her came the quick beat of a horse's hoofs and a shrill whistle. A twelve-year-old boy was riding toward her as fast as his big gray horse could carry him. He was riding bareback, straight and lithe as a young Indian, his cap pushed to the back of his head. He snatched it off with a flourish as he came within speaking distance of the Little Colonel, his freckled face all ashine with pleasure.

"Hello! Lloyd," he called, "I was just going to your house."

"And I was looking for you, Bobby," she an-

swered, as informally as if it were only yesterday they had parted, instead of eight months before.

"Come and go down to the post-office with me. I must take these lettahs."

"All right," said Rob, wheeling the gray horse around beside the black pony, and smiling broadly as he looked down into the Little Colonel's welcoming eyes. "You don't know how good it feels to get back to the country again, Lloyd. I could hardly wait for school to close, when I'd think about the fish waiting for me out here in the creek, and the wild strawberries getting ripe, and the horses just spoiling to be exercised. It was more than I could stand. What have you been doing all winter?"

"Oh, the same old things: school and music lessons, and good times in the evenin' with mothah and papa Jack and grandfathah."

As they jogged along, side by side, the Little Colonel chatting gaily of all that had happened since their last meeting, Rob kept casting curious glances at her. "What have you been doing to yourself, Lloyd Sherman?" he demanded, finally. "You look so — so *different!*" There was such a puzzled expression in his sharp gray eyes that the Little Colonel laughed. Then her hand flew up to her head.

"Don't you see? I've had my hair cut. I had to

beg and beg befo' mothah and papa Jack would let me have it done; but it was so long, — away below my waist, — and *such* a bothah. It had to be brushed and plaited a dozen times a day."

"I don't like it that way. It isn't a bit becoming," said Rob, with the frankness of old comradeship. "You look like a boy. Why, it is as short as mine."

"I don't care," answered Lloyd, her eyes flashing dangerously. "It's comfortable this way, and grandfathah likes it. He says he's got his Little Colonel back again now, and he sent to town for this Napoleon hat like the ones I used to weah when I was a little thing."

"When you were a little thing!" laughed Rob, teasingly. "What do you think you are now, missy? You're head and shoulders shorter than I am."

"I'm eleven yeahs old, anyway, I'd have you to undahstand, Bobby Moore," answered the Little Colonel, with such dignity that Rob wished he hadn't spoken. "I was eleven last week. That was one of my birthday presents, havin' my own way about cuttin' my hair, and anothah was the house pahty. Oh, you don't know anything about the house pahty I'm to have in June, do you!" she cried, every trace of displeasure vanishing at the thought. "Grandfathah and papa Jack are goin' away fo' a

month to some mineral springs in Va'ginia, and I'm to have my house pahty in June to keep mothah and me from bein' lonesome. It will not be a very big one, only three girls to spend June with me, but mothah says we can have picnics every day if we want to, and invite all the boys and girls in the Valley, and we can have the house full from mawnin' till night. I'll invite you right now for every day that you want to come. We'll expect you at all the pahties and picnics and candy-pullin's that we have. I want you to help me give the girls a good time, Bobby."

Rob whirled his cap around his head with a "Whe-ew! Jolly for you!" before he answered more politely, "Thank you, Lloyd, you can count on me for my part. I'll be on hand every time you turn around, if you want me. Who all's coming?"

For answer Lloyd held up the three letters she was carrying, and let him see the first address, written in Mrs. Sherman's flowing hand.

Miss Eugenia Forbes,
The Waldorf-Astoria,
New York City.

"Well, who is she?" he asked, reading it aloud.

"Eugenia is a sort of cousin of mine," explained Lloyd. "At least her fathah and my fathah are

related in some way. I used to know her when we lived in New York, but I haven't seen her since we left. I was five then and she was seven, so she must be neahly thirteen yeahs old now. When we played togethah she would scream and *scream* if I didn't give up to her in everything, and as I had a bad tempah, too, we were always fussin'. She was dreadfully spoiled. I'll nevah fo'get how my hand bled one day when she bit it, or how she clawed my face till it looked as if a tigah had scratched it."

"Then what did you do?" asked Rob, with a grin. He had experimented with Lloyd's temper himself in the past.

"I believe that that was the time I pounded her on the back with my little red chair," answered Lloyd, laughing at the recollection. "Or maybe it was the time I banged her ovah the head with a toy teakettle. I remembah I did both those bad things, and that we were always in trouble whenevah we were togethah. I didn't want mothah to invite her, but she said she felt that we ought to. Eugenia's mothah is dead. She died three yeahs ago, and since then she's been kept in a boa'din' school most of the time. When she's not away at school she stays in some big hotel with her fathah, eithah in New York or at some summah resort. He is always so busy

there's no one to pay any attention to her but her maid. They are very wealthy, and Eugenia has had the best of everything so long that I'm afraid she'll find the Valley dreadfully poah and poky. I imagine she's stuck up, too. She used to be, and she's always had her own way about everything."

"Number one doesn't sound very inviting," said Rob, with a sour grimace. "Who is your number two?" Lloyd held out the second envelope.

Miss Joyce Ware,
Plainsville,
Kansas.

"I nevah saw her," said Lloyd, "but I feel as if we had always been old friends. Her mothah and mine used to go to school togethah heah in Lloydsboro Valley at the Girls' College, and they've written to each othah once a month for fifteen yeahs. Mrs. Ware is a widow now, and they have ha'd times, for they are poah, and she has foah children youngah than Joyce. But Joyce has had lots of things that neithah Eugenia nor I have had. Last yeah her cousin Kate took her abroad with her, and she studied French, and she had lots of beautiful times where they spent the wintah in France. Mrs. Ware sent some of the lettahs to mothah that Joyce wrote,

One was about a Christmas tree that they gave to thirty little peasant children, — and so many queer things happened behind a gate that they called the 'Gate of the Giant Scissahs,' because there was a pair of enormous scissahs hanging ovah it, you know. Oh, it was just like a fairy tale, all the things that Joyce did when she was in Touraine."

"How old is she?" interrupted Rob.

"Just Eugenia's age, I believe, and she must be an interestin' sort of girl, for she draws beautifully. Mothah says that her sketches are fine, and that Joyce will be a real artist when she is grown."

"Number two is all right," said Rob, with an approving nod. "Next!" The Little Colonel held out the third envelope.

"One flew east and one flew west, so I s'pose this will fly into the cuckoo's nest," said Rob, as he read the address:

Miss Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis,
Jaynes's Post-office,
Kentucky.

"Why, that's just what mothah calls the place," cried the Little Colonel, "the cuckoo's nest! She says that the cuckoo is the most careless bird in the world about the way it builds its nest. They weave

a few twigs and sticks togethah just in any kind of way, and nevah mind a bit if their poah little young ones fall out of the nest. They seem to think that any kind of home is good enough, and that is the kind of a home that Elizabeth Lewis has. She is a poah little orphan, and is livin' on a farm up Green Rivah. Mother is her godmothah. That's why she is named Elizabeth Lloyd. Mrs. Lewis was an old school friend of mothah's, too, and she wants Joyce and Elizabeth and me to be as deah friends as she and Emily Ware and Joyce Lewis were, she says. That's why she invited them."

"And you don't know anything about this one?" questioned Rob.

"Not a thing. I shouldn't be su'prised if she's mighty countrified, for the farm is several miles from a railroad, and the people she lives with don't think of anything but work, yeah in and yeah out."

They had reached the post-office by this time, and Rob held out his hand for the letters. "I'll put them in for you," he said. Then, dropping them into the box, one by one, he repeated the rhyme:

"One flew east and one flew west,
And one flew into the cuckoo's nest."

Lloyd added, quickly:

> "Eugenia, Joyce, or Elizabeth,
> Which of the three shall we like best?"

"Joyce," said Rob, promptly.

"I think so, too," agreed the Little Colonel, stooping to fasten the locust blossoms more securely behind the pony's ears.

"Well, the invitations are off now. Come on, Tarbaby, and see if you can't beat Bobby Moore's old gray hawse so bad it will be ashamed to evah race again."

With that the little black pony was off like an arrow toward Locust, with the big gray horse thundering hard at its heels.

The dust flew, dogs barked, and chickens ran squawking across the road out of the way. Heads were thrust out of the windows as the two vanished up the dusty pike, and an old graybeard loafing in front of the corner grocery gave an amused chuckle. "Beats all how them two do get over the ground," he said. "They ride like Tam O'Shanter, and I'll bet a quarter there's nothing on earth that either of 'em are afraid of."

A little while later the three white envelopes were jogging sociably along, side by side in a mail-bag,

on their way to Louisville. But their course did not lie together long. In the city post-office they were separated, and sent on their different ways, like three white carrier-pigeons, to bid the guests make ready for the Little Colonel's house party.

CHAPTER II.

"ONE FLEW INTO THE CUCKOO'S NEST."

THE letter for Jaynes's Post-office reached the end of its journey first. It wasn't much of a post-office; only an old case of pigeon-holes set up in one corner of a cross-roads store. A man riding over from the nearest town twice a week brought the mail-bag on horseback. So few letters found their way into this particular bag that Squire Jaynes, who kept the store and post-office, felt a personal interest in every envelope that passed through his hands.

"Miss Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis," he spelled aloud, examining the address through his square-bowed spectacles with a critical squint. "Now, who under the canopy might *she* be?"

There was no one in the store to answer the question but an overgrown boy who had stopped to get his father's weekly paper. He sat on the counter dangling his big bare feet against a nail-keg, and catching flies in his sunburned hands, while he waited for the mail to be opened.

The squire peered inquiringly at him over the square-bowed spectacles. "Jake," he asked, "ever hear tell of a Miss Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis up this way?"

"Wy, sure!" drawled the boy. "That's Betty. The Appletons' Betty. Don't you know? She's that little orphan they're a-bringin' up. I worked there a while this spring, a-plowin'."

"Hump!" grunted the squire, slipping the letter into the pigeon-hole marked "A." "If that's who it is, I know all about her. Precious little bringing up she'll get at the Appletons', I can tell you that. They keep her because they're her nearest of living kin, which isn't very near, after all; fourth or fifth cousins to her father, or something like that. Anyhow, they're all she's got, and her father made some arrangement with them before he died. Left a little money to pay her board, they say, but I've heard she works just the same as if she was living on charity."

"That's the truth," said Jake; "she does. Talk about bringin' up. She doesn't get any of it. Mrs. Appleton has her hands so full of cookin' for farm hands and all, that she can't half tend to her own children, let alone anybody else's. It's Betty that 'pears to be bringin' up the little Appletons."

"I'm glad there's somebody takes enough interest

in the child to write to her," continued the gossipy old squire, who often talked to himself when he could find no other audience. "I wonder who it is. Lloydsboro Valley it's postmarked. Wish she'd happen down here. I'd ask her who it's from."

Jake got up, dragged his bare feet across the floor, and leaned lazily on the counter as he reached for his paper.

"Little Betty will be mighty proud to get a real shore 'nuff letter all for herself. I never got one in my life. I'll take it up to her, squire, if you say so. I'm goin' by the Appletons' on my way home."

"Reckon you might as well," answered the old man, giving a final close scrutiny before handing it to the boy. "It might lie here all week in case none of them happened to come to the store, and it looks as if it might be important."

Jake slipped the letter into the band of his broad-brimmed straw hat and slouched lazily out of the store. An old blaze-faced sorrel horse whinnied as he stepped up to untie it. Jake mounted and rode off slowly, his bare feet dangling far below the stirrups. It was two miles to the Appleton farm, down a hot, dusty road, and he took his time in going. Well for little Betty that she did not know what wonderful surprise was on its way to her, or

she would have been in a fever of impatience for the letter to arrive.

It had been a tiresome day for the child. Up before five, in her bare little room in the west gable, busy with morning chores until breakfast was ready, she had earned a rest long before the Little Colonel's day had begun. Afterward she had helped with the breakfast dishes and had taken her turn at the butter-making in the spring-house, thumping the heavy dasher up and down in the cedar churn until her arms ached. But it was cool and pleasant down in the spring-house with the water trickling out in a ceaseless drip-drip on the cold stones. She dabbled her fingers in the spring for a long time when the churning was done, wishing she had nothing to do but sit there and listen to the secrets it was trying to tell. Surely it must have learned a great many on its underground way among the roots of things, and all else that lies hidden in the earth.

But she could not loiter long. There was the dinner-table to set for the hungry farm-hands, and after the dinner was over more dishes to wash. Then there were some towels to iron. It was two o'clock before her work was all done, and she had time to go up to her little room in the west gable.

The sun poured in through the shutterless win

dows so fiercely that she did not stay long, — only long enough to put on a clean apron and brush her curly hair, as she stood in front of the little looking-glass. It was such a tiny mirror that she could see only a part of her face at a time. When her big brown eyes, wistful and questioning as a fawn's, were reflected in it, there was no room for the sensitive little mouth. Or if she stood on tiptoe so that she could see her plump round chin, dimpled cheeks, and white teeth, the eyes were left out, and she could see no more of her inquisitive little nose than lay below the big freckle in the middle of it.

Hastily tying back her curls with a bow of brown ribbon, she slipped on her apron, and ran down-stairs, buttoning it as she went. She was free now to do as she pleased until supper-time. Once out of the house, she walked slowly along through the shady orchard, swinging her sunbonnet by the strings. After the orchard came the long leafy lane, with its double rows of cherry-trees, and then the gate at the end, leading into the public highway.

As she slipped her hand around the post to unfasten the chain that held the gate, little bare feet came pattering behind her, and a shrill voice called: "Wait, Betty, wait a minute!" It was Davy Appleton. Betty's little lamb, they called him, and Betty's

shadow, and Betty's sticking-plaster, because everywhere she went there was Davy just at her heels.

All the Appleton children were boys, — three younger and two older than Davy, whose last birthday cake should have had eight candles if there had been any celebration of the event. But there never had been a birthday cake with candles on it on the Appleton table. It would have been considered a foolish waste of time and money, and birthdays came and went sometimes, without the children knowing that they had passed.

Davy was a queer little fellow. He tagged along after Betty, switching at the grass with a whip he carried, never saying a word after that first eager call for her to wait. The two never tired of each other. He was content to follow and ask no questions, for he had learned long ago to look twice before he spoke once. As he caught up with her at the gate, he did not even ask where she was going, knowing that he would find out in due time if he only followed far enough.

He did not have to follow far to-day. Betty led the way across the road to a plain little wooden church, set back in a grove of cedar-trees. Behind the church was a graveyard, where they often strolled on summer afternoons, through the tangle of grass

and weeds and myrtle vines, to read the names on the tombstones and smell the pinks and lilies that struggled up year after year above the neglected mounds. But that was not their errand to-day. A little red bookcase inside the church was the attraction. Betty had only lately discovered it, although it had stood for years on a back bench in a cobwebby corner.

It held all that was left of a scattered Sunday-school library, that had been in use two generations before. Queer little books they were, time-yellowed and musty smelling, but to story-loving little Betty, hungry for something new, they seemed a veritable gold-mine. She had found that no key barred her way into this little red treasure-house of a bookcase, and a board propped against the wall under the window outside gave her an easy entrance into the church. Here she came day after day, when her work was done, to pore over the musty old volumes of tales forgotten long ago.

In Betty's little room under the roof at home was a pile of handsomely bound books, lying on a chest beside her mother's Bible. They were twelve in all, and had come in several different Christmas boxes, and each one had Betty's name on the fly-leaf, with the date of the Christmas on which it happened to

be sent. Underneath was always written: "From your loving godmother, Elizabeth Lloyd Sherman."

Excepting a few school-books and some out-of-date census reports, they were the only books in the Appleton house. Betty guarded them like a little dragon. They were the only things she owned that the children were not allowed to touch. Even Davy, when he was permitted to look at the wonderful pictures in her "Arabian Nights," or "Pilgrim's Progress," or "Mother Goose," had to sit with his hands behind his back while she carefully turned the leaves. Besides these three, there was "Alice in Wonderland," and "Æsop's Fables," there was "Robinson Crusoe," and "Little Women," and two volumes of fairy tales in green and gold with a gorgeous peacock on the cover. Eugene Field's poems had come in the last box, with Riley's "Songs of Childhood" and Kipling's jungle tales. Twelve beautiful books, all of Mrs. Sherman's giving, and they were like twelve great windows to Betty, opening into a new strange world, far away from the experiences of her every-day life.

She had read them over and over so many times that she always knew what was coming next, even before she turned the page; and she had read them to the other children so many times that they, too, knew them almost by heart.

The little dog-eared books in the meeting-house proved poor reading sometimes after such entertainment. So many of them were about unnaturally good children who never did wrong, and unnaturally bad children who never did right. At the end there was always the word MORAL, in big capital letters, as if the readers were supposed to be too blind to find it for themselves, and it had to be put directly across the path for them to stumble over.

Betty laughed at them sometimes, but she touched the little books with reverent fingers, when she remembered how old they were, and how long ago their first childish readers laid them aside. The hands that had held them first had years before grown tired and wrinkled and old, and had been lying for a generation under the myrtle and lilies of the churchyard outside.

Many an afternoon she had spent, perched in the high window, with her feet drawn up under her on the sill, reading aloud to Davy, who lay outside on the grass, staring up at the sky. Davy's short fat legs could not climb from the board to the window-sill, and since this little Mahomet could not come to the mountain, Betty had to carry the mountain to him.

The reading was slow work sometimes. Davy's

mind, like his legs, could not climb as far as Betty's, and she usually had to stop at the bottom of every page to explain something. Often he fell asleep in the middle of the most interesting part, and then Betty read on to herself, with nothing to break the stillness around her but the buzzing of the wasps, as they darted angrily in and out of the open window above her head.

To-day Betty had read nearly an hour, and Davy's eyelids were beginning to flutter drowsily, when they heard the slow thud of a horse's hoofs in the thick dust of the road. Betty stopped reading to listen, and Davy sat up to look.

"It's Jake," he announced, recognising the boy who had helped his father with the ploughing.

"Hope he won't see us," said Betty, in a low tone, drawing in her head. "We are not hurting anything, but maybe some of the church people wouldn't like it, if they knew I climbed in at the window. They might think it wasn't respectful."

"He's looking this way," said Davy, who had stood up for a better view, but squatted down again at Betty's command.

It was too late. Jake had recognised Davy's shock of yellow hair, and called out, good-naturedly, "Hello, stickin'-plaster, where's Betty? Somewhere around

"'OH, RUN AND GET IT, QUICK, DAVY,' SHE CRIED."

here, I'll bet anything, or you wouldn't be here. I've got a letter for her."

At that, Betty leaned so far out of the window that she nearly lost her balance and toppled over. "Oh, run and get it, quick, Davy," she cried. The little bare feet twinkled through the grass to meet the old sorrel horse, and two brown hands were held up to receive the letter; but Jake preferred to deliver the important document himself.

"Here you are," he said, riding alongside the window and dropping the letter into her eager hands.

"Oh, *thank* you, Jake," she cried. "It makes me feel as if Christmas was coming. I never got a letter in my life except in my Christmas boxes. My godmother always writes to me then, and this must be from her, too. Yes, it is, I know her handwriting."

If Jake expected her to tear it open instantly and share the news with him before she had examined every inch of the big square envelope, he was disappointed. The old blaze-faced sorrel had carried him out of sight before she had finished cutting it open with a pin. Then she spread the letter out on her knees, drawing a long breath of pleasure as the faintest odour of violets floated up from the paper with its dainty monogram at the top.

Davy waited in silence, watching a flush spread

over Betty's face as she read. Her breath came short and her heart beat fast.

"Oh, Davy," she exclaimed, in a low, wondering tone. "What do you think? It is an invitation to a house party at Locust; Lloyd Sherman's house party. Oh, it's like a lovely, lovely fairy tale with me for the princess. I've never travelled on the cars since I was old enough to remember it, and they've sent passes for me to go. I've never had any girls to play with in all my life, and now there will be two besides Lloyd; and, oh, Davy, best of all, I'll see my beautiful, beautiful godmother! I shall be there a whole month, and she knew my mamma and was her dearest friend. I haven't seen her since I was a baby, when she came to my christening, and of course I can't remember anything about that."

Davy listened to her raptures without saying anything for awhile. Then he set aside his usual custom and asked a question. "Why are you crying?" he demanded. "There's a tear running down the side of your nose."

"Is there?" asked Betty, brushing it away with the back of her hand. "I didn't know it. Maybe it's because I am so glad. It seems as if I was going back to my own family; to somebody who really belongs to you more than just fourth cousins, you

know. A godmother must be the next best thing to a real mother, you see, Davy, because it's a mother that God gives you to take the place of your own, when she is gone. Oh, let's hurry home and tell Cousin Hetty."

Slipping from the window-sill to the floor, she carried the book she had been reading back to its corner in the little red bookcase, and shut it up with the musty volumes inside. Then she walked slowly down the narrow aisle of the little meeting-house, between its double rows of narrow straight-backed pews. As she reached the bench-like altar, extending in front of the pulpit, she slipped to her knees a moment. Her sunbonnet had fallen back from her tousled curls, and the late afternoon sun streamed across her shining little face.

"Thank you, God," came in a happy whisper from the depths of a glad little heart. "It's the nicest surprise you ever sent me, and I'm *so* much obliged."

Then Betty stood up and put on her sunbonnet. The next moment she had scrambled over the sill, pulled the window down after her, and walked down the slanting board to the ground. Catching Davy by the hand, and swinging it back and forth as they ran, she went skipping across the road regardless of the

dust. Down the lane they went, between the rows of cherry-trees; across the orchard and up the path. Somehow the world had never before seemed half so beautiful to Betty as it did now. The May skies had never been quite so blue, or the afternoon sunshine so heavenly golden. She sang as she went, swinging Davy's warm little hand in hers. It was only one of Mother Goose's old melodies, but she sang it as a bird sings, for sheer gladness:

"Gay go up and gay go down,
To ring the bells of London town."

CHAPTER III.

"ONE FLEW EAST."

THE New York letter reached the hotel while Eugenia was out in the park with her maid, and the bell-boy brought it to her on a salver with several others, as she was stepping into the elevator to go up to her room.

"Here, take my gloves, Eliot!" she exclaimed, tossing them to the maid, and beginning to tear open the envelopes as soon as her hands were free. Eliot, a plain, middle-aged woman, with a patient face and slow gait, picked up the gloves, and followed her young mistress down the corridor.

Eugenia dashed into her sitting-room, throwing herself into a big armchair, regardless of the fact that she was crushing the roses in her pretty new hat as she leaned her head against the high back. Three of the letters which she opened so eagerly were from the girls who had been her best friends at boarding-school. She had been away from Riverdale Seminary only a week, but already she was

homesick to go back. The school was a very select one, and the rules were rigid, but Eugenia had known no other home for three years.

In the great hotel where she was now, she saw her father only in the evenings, and during breakfast, and she always rebelled when she had to go back to it in vacation. There was so little she could do that she really enjoyed. There was a stupid round of drives and walks, shopping and piano practice, and after that nothing but to mope and fret and worry poor Eliot. At school there was always the excitement of evading some rule or breaking it without being caught; and if there was no joke in prospect to giggle over, there was the memory of one just passed to make them laugh. And then there were always Mollie and Fay and Kit Keller — dear old "Kell" — ready to laugh or cry or lark with her any hour of the day or night, as it suited her mood.

Only seven days of vacation had passed, but to Eugenia it seemed an age since the four had walked back and forth across the school campus, with their arms around each other, waiting for the 'bus that was to drive them to the station.

The others were not so sorry to go, for they would be in the midst of their families. Mollie was to go to the mountains with all the members of her house-

hold, Fay to an island in the St. Lawrence, where her family had their summer home, and Kell was going on a long yachting trip, maybe to the Bermudas. It would be September before they all met again.

For Eugenia there was nothing in prospect but lonely days at the Waldorf, until her father could find time to take her down to the seashore for a few weeks. The tears were in her eyes when she laid down the three letters, after twice reading the one signed, "For ever your devoted old chum, Kell." It had been full of the good times she was having at home.

Eugenia looked around the elegantly furnished room with a discontented sigh. No girl in the school had as much spending money as herself, or as wealthy and as indulgent a father, and yet — just at that moment — she felt herself the poorest child in New York. There was one thing she lacked that even the poorest beggar had, she thought bitterly, — companionship. In a listless sort of way she picked up the remaining letter, postmarked Lloydsboro Valley, and began to read it.

Eliot, who was busy in the adjoining room, heard an excited exclamation, and then the call, "Oh, Eliot, Eliot! Come here, quick!" She was stooping over

the bed inspecting some clean clothes that had been sent in from the laundry. Before she could straighten herself up to answer the call, her elbows were seized from behind, and Eugenia began waltzing her around backwards at a rate that made her head spin.

"Dance! You giddy old thing!" cried Eugenia. "Whoop and make a noise and act as if you are glad! We are going to get out of our cage next week. I'm invited to a house party. We are to spend a whole month in a *house*, not a hotel. We're going to be part of a real live family in a real sure enough home, — in an old Southern mansion."

"Goodness gracious, Miss Eugenia," panted Eliot, as she staggered into a chair and settled her cap on her head. "You a'most scared me out of me five wits, you were that sudden in your movements. I thought for a bit as you had gone stark mad. You gave me quite a turn, you did."

Eugenia laughed. "I had to let off steam in some way," she said; "and really, Eliot, you can't imagine how glad I am. They're cousins of papa's, you know, the Shermans are. I used to know Lloyd when they lived in New York. We played together every day, and fussed — my eyes, how we fussed! But that was before she could talk plain, and she

must be eleven now, for she's about two years younger than I am."

Perching herself on the bed among piles of snowy linen, Eugenia clasped her hands around her knees and began to tell all she could remember of the Little Colonel. Because there was no one else to confide in, she confided in the maid. Patient old Eliot listened to much family history that did not interest her and which she immediately forgot, and to many girlish rhapsodies over "Cousin Elizabeth," whom Eugenia declared was the dearest thing that ever drew the breath of life.

As Eugenia talked on, idly rocking herself back and forth on the bed, Eliot sorted the linen with deft fingers, laying some of it away in drawers, sweet with dainty sachets, and putting some aside that needed a stitch or two. Presently, as she listened, she found herself taking more interest in the country place that Eugenia described than in anything she had heard of since she said good-bye to her dear little cottage home in England. She began to hope that Mr. Forbes would consent to Eugenia's accepting the invitation, and expressed that wish to Eugenia.

"Why, of course I am going!" exclaimed Eugenia, in surprise. "Whether papa wants me to or not! I shall answer Cousin Elizabeth's letter this very

minute and accept the invitation before he comes home. Then if he makes a fuss it will be too late, and I can tease him into a good humour."

Bouncing off the bed, she went back to the sitting-room and sat down at her desk. When that letter was written, carefully, and in her best style, she dashed off three notes in an almost unreadable scrawl, to Mollie and Fay and Kell, telling them of her invitation and the delight it gave her. Then she wandered back to the bedroom where Eliot sat mending, and wandered restlessly around the room.

"How slow the time goes," she exclaimed, pausing in front of the mantel. "Two hours until papa will be here. I want to tell him about it, and ask for some more money. I need an extra allowance for this visit."

There was a little Dresden clock on the mantel; two cupids holding up a flower basket, from which swung a spray of roses that formed the pendulum.

"Two long hours," she fumed, scowling at the clock. "Hurry up, you old slow-poke," she cried, catching up the fragile little timepiece and shaking it until the pendulum rattled against the cupids' plump legs. "I can't bear to wait for things."

"But life is mostly waiting, miss," said Eliot, with a solemn shake of her head. "You'll find that out

when you are as old as I am. We wait for this and we wait for that, and first thing we know the years are gone, and we are standing with one foot in the grave, waiting for Death to lift us in."

Eugenia put her hands over her ears with a little scream. "Stop talking like that, Eliot," she cried. "I won't listen, and I won't spend my life waiting in that way. You may if you want to."

Running back to her sitting-room, she banged the door behind her to shut out the sound of Eliot's voice. The next hour she spent by the window, looking down on the shifting scenes of the streets below, -- the noisy New York streets, spread out like a giant picture-book before her. Then it began to grow dark, and lights twinkled here and there, and great letters of flame appeared as by magic across the fronts of buildings, and on the electric arches spanning the streets.

Eliot came and drew the curtains, and a glance at the little cupids told her it was time to dress for dinner.

"I'll wear my buttercup dress to-night, Eliot," said Eugenia, when her black hair had been carefully brushed and plaited in two long braids. "It always makes my eyes look so big and dark, somehow, and brings out the colour in my lips and cheeks."

"You are a young one to be noticing such things as that," said Eliot, under her breath. She wanted to say it aloud, but she only pursed her lips together as she got out the dress Eugenia had asked for. It was of some soft, clinging material, of the same sunny yellow that buttercups wear, and Eugenia knew very well how becoming it was to her brunette style of beauty. After she was dressed, she spun around before the pier-glass until she heard her father's step in the hall.

Although she had been so impatient for his coming, she said nothing about the invitation from Locust until they had gone down to dinner and were seated in the great dining-room together. She knew that that was not the way Mollie or Fay or Kell would have done. Any one of them would have rushed at her father the moment he came in sight, and would have put her arms around his neck and poured out the whole story. But Eugenia had never felt on such intimate terms with her father. She admired him extremely, and thought he was the handsomest man she had ever seen, but her love for him was of a selfish kind. So long as he indulged her and never opposed her will, she was a most dutiful little daughter, but as soon as his wishes crossed hers she pouted and sulked.

To her surprise, he made no objection to her accepting the invitation to the house party, except to say, half-laughingly, "Don't you think you are a little selfish to want to run off and leave me alone when I've scarcely seen you all winter?" Then he laughed outright as she made a saucy little grimace in answer. He would miss her very much when she was gone, for she was a bright little thing and amused him, but he had a feeling of relief as well to think that a month of her vacation would be pleasantly occupied. She had been so discontented away from her little friends.

After dinner they strolled into an alcove, screened from the hall by great pots of palms, and sat down to listen to the music, and watch the people passing back and forth. It was a gay scene. Ladies in elaborate evening gowns passed out with their escorts to the opera, or waited for the carriages that were to take them later to balls or receptions. Everywhere there was the gleam of white shoulders, the nodding of jewelled aigrettes, the flashing of diamond tiaras. Above it all rose the odour of flowers, the hum of voices, and the music of violins.

Mr. Forbes, smiling through half-closed eyelids at this passing of Vanity Fair, looked down at Eugenia. She was leaning forward in a picturesque pose against

the arm of her high-backed chair. The light fell softly on her pale yellow gown and her dusky hair. The red lips were parted in a smile as she watched the pretty pageant, and there was a bright colour in her cheeks.

Mr. Forbes was proud of his handsome little daughter. He admired her ease of manner, and boasted that she was as self-possessed under all circumstances as any grown woman he knew. It pleased him to have his friends predict that she would be a brilliant social success. He was doing everything in his power to make her that, and yet — sometimes — a vague fear crossed his mind that she was growing cold and selfish. Sometimes she seemed far too old and worldly-wise for a child of her age. He sighed as he looked at her. They were sitting so near each other that his hand rested on the arm of her chair. Yet he felt that they had grown widely apart in their long absences.

"What are you thinking about, Eugenia?" he asked, suddenly. She turned with a little start.

"Oh, I had forgotten that you were there!" she exclaimed. "I was thinking of Locust, and how glad I would be to get away from this tiresome place. It's such a bore to do the same thing night after night, and always watch the same kind of people."

A shadow crossed his face, but she did not see it. She had turned back to her day dreams in which he had no part. Happy little day-dreams, of what was to come with the coming June.

CHAPTER IV.

"ONE FLEW WEST."

Out in the village of Plainsville, Kansas, the rain was running in torrents down the gables of the little brown house where the Ware family lived. It had rained all day, a cold, steady pour, until the world outside had taken on the appearance of early March, instead of late May.

Holland and Mary and the baby (they called him baby still, although he was nearly four) were playing menagerie in the corners of the dining-room. They had a tent made of the clothes-horse and some sheets, and the growling and roaring that went on inside was something terrific. It made no difference to the little mother, placidly sewing by the last rays of daylight at one of the western windows; but the noise grated on Joyce's mood.

Joyce had finished setting the supper-table, and while she waited for the potatoes to boil she stood with her face pressed against the kitchen window, looking gloomily out into the back yard.

It was not a cheerful outlook. Nothing was to be seen but the high board alley fence with a broken chicken-coop leaning against it, the weather-beaten old stable, and a scraggy, dripping peach-tree. The yard was full of puddles, and still the rain splashed on. The sight made Joyce want to cry.

"If I wasn't at home," she said to herself, "I should think that I am homesick, for I feel the way I did that day up in Monsieur Gréville's pear-tree in the old French garden. Then I was tired of France and everything foreign, and would have given all I owned to be back in America. Now I am here with mother and the children, but still I am as unhappy and dissatisfied as I was then. I wonder why!"

It had been less than a year since Joyce had had that wonderful winter in Touraine with her cousin Kate, but it seemed such a long, long time ago, in looking back upon it. She had settled down into the common humdrum round of duties so completely that sometimes it seemed to her that she had never been away at all; that she must have dreamed that year into her life, or read about it as happening to some other girl.

As she stood with her face pressed against the window-pane, the noise in the dining-room suddenly ceased, and Mary came into the kitchen, followed

by the rest of the menagerie. "I'm tired of being a lion," she said, wiping her flushed little face with the sleeve of her apron, and shaking back her funny little tails of hair tied with red ribbon, that were always bobbing forward over her shoulders.

"I've roared till my throat is sore, and I'm hungry. Isn't supper most ready, sister?"

Joyce glanced at the clock. "It'll be ready in ten minutes," she answered, and returned to her survey of the back yard.

"I wish that we were going to have dumplings for supper to-night," said Holland, "and turkey and sausages. Don't you, Mary?" He snuffed hungrily at the saucepan on the stove.

"No," said Mary, pausing thoughtfully, as if considering a weighty matter. "I'd rather have ice-cream and chocolate cake. If I had a witch with a wand that's what I'd wish for supper to-night. Wouldn't you, sister?"

Joyce turned away from the window and lifted the lid from the kettle in which the stew was bubbling. "I don't know," she said, gazing dreamily into the depths of the savoury stew. "If I had that old witch with a wand that you are always talking about, I'd not stop simply with something to eat. I would wish myself back in Tours, with Madame sweeping down

to dinner in her red velvet gown, and the candle-light shining on the cut glass and silver. I'd wish for dinner to be served elegantly in courses as Henri did it there every night, and I'd hear old Monsieur making his little jokes over the walnuts and wine. And afterward there wouldn't be any dishes for me to wash, as there are here, and at bedtime Marie would come with my candle and untie my slippers and brush my hair. Oh, it's so nice to be waited on! You don't know how I miss it sometimes. It is horrid to be poor."

Mary and Holland listened in flattering silence. They had great respect for their thirteen-year old sister, who had been across seas and visited old chateaux where kings and queens once lived. She was the only child in Plainsville who could boast the distinction of having been abroad, and there was a glamour about it that enchanted them. They were never tired of hearing of her adventures.

"It's horrid to be poor," she said again, clapping the lid on the kettle. "I hate to live in a little crowded-up house, and spoil my hands with dust and dish-water, and do the same things year in and year out."

Joyce stopped suddenly, wishing that she could unsay that last speech, for the little mother had

come into the kitchen in time to hear it. There was a pained expression on her face.

"I am afraid my bird of passage will never be satisfied with the little home nest again," she said, sadly.

"Oh, mother, I didn't mean it as bad as it sounds; truly, I didn't," cried Joyce. "You know that usually I am as contented as a cricket; but I don't know what is the matter with me to-day. It must be the weather."

Just then there was a stamping on the porch outside, and the violent flapping of an umbrella to rid it of the raindrops clinging to it.

"Jack!" shouted Mary, rushing to the door, with Holland and the baby tagging at her heels. "A letter for Joyce!" they called in chorus the next instant, all straggling back after the oldest brother as he bore it triumphantly into the kitchen.

"From Lloydsboro Valley," announced Joyce, and Mrs. Ware's face lighted up with one of her rare smiles.

"Ah, I knew it was coming," she said, "and I am sure it will prove an antidote for your blues. I had a letter from the same place last week, and I've been in the secret ever since."

"What secret?" demanded Mary, her eyes round with curiosity, and Jack echoed the question.

"That Joyce was to be invited to a house party in June, back in 'My old Kentucky home.' The invitation is from one of my old school friends. There were three of us," she went on, in answer to the look of eager interest in Mary's eyes. "Three girls who grew up together: Joyce Allen (your sister is named for her), Elizabeth Lloyd, and myself. And now our little daughters are to meet in the same dear old valley where we played together and grew up together and learned to love each other like sisters. I hope they will become as dear friends as we were."

Joyce looked up from her letter, her face aglow with joyful surprise. "Oh, mother!" she cried, "do you really mean it? Is it possible that I am to go? How can you afford it?"

Mrs. Ware motioned toward the envelope lying at Joyce's feet.

"Look again," she said, "and you will find that Mr. Sherman has sent a pass. As for the clothes, well, your 'witch with a wand' has come to the rescue again."

"Cousin Kate?" gasped Joyce.

Mrs. Ware nodded. "What would you think if I were to tell you that there has been a box hidden away in my closet for nearly a week, waiting for this

letter, which I knew was on its way, and inside are the very things you need to complete your summer outfit? There is a new hat, for one thing, and material for several very pretty dresses."

Mary danced up and down, her hair-ribbons bobbing over her shoulders, and her face ashine, as she cried, "Oh, sister, isn't it lovely? I'm so glad, I'm so glad, I'm so glad!"

But Joyce stood with her face suddenly grown serious and her lips trembling. Her little sister's unselfish delight made her conscience hurt. Putting her arms around her mother's neck, she hid her face against her shoulder. "Oh, mother," she sobbed, "I don't deserve it all! Here I've been so fretful and discontented all day, thinking there'd never be any good times any more, and that there was nothing but work ahead of me, and all the time this beautiful surprise was on its way. I don't deserve for it to be mine. It ought to be Mary's. She never frets over things."

Mrs. Ware looked down into Mary's face, still a-smile with the thought of her sister's pleasure, and said: "Mary is to have a little slice of this, too. I wonder what she will say when she sees a certain pink parasol that I saw in that box, and a white sash with pink rosebuds on it, and slippers that I'm

sure wouldn't fit anything else in the house but her own wigglesome little feet."

Mary's hands came together ecstatically, with a long-drawn "Oh!" Then she clasped her mother around the knees, demanding, breathlessly:

"Anything for Holland in that box?"

"Yes."

"Anything for Jack?"

"Yes."

"Anything for the baby?"

Mrs. Ware nodded.

"And you?"

Another nod.

"Then there isn't a single word in the dictionary good enough to fit!" screamed Mary, excitedly, spinning around and around in the kitchen floor until the red ribbons stood out at right angles from her head. "There isn't a single word, Holland; we'll just have to *squeal!*"

At that she gave a long, ear-piercing shriek that seemed to go through the roof like a fine-pointed needle. Holland and the baby joined in, each trying to make a louder noise than the other. Their eyes were tightly shut, their mouths wide open, and their faces red to bursting.

"There, there, children!" exclaimed Mrs. Ware,

laughingly, as they stopped to take breath. "The neighbours will think that the house is on fire. We'll have a policeman after us if you make such a noise."

"The kettle is boiling over!" cried Holland, and Joyce flew to the rescue. Jack went to change his wet clothes, and the three smaller children trotted back and forth, pushing chairs to the table, and helping to carry in the supper.

Many a bedraggled passer-by that evening looked out from under his dripping umbrella as he neared the little brown house, cheered by a babel of happy voices. The lamplight streaming across the wet pavement drew his gaze to a window whose blinds had not been closed, and the picture lingered pleasantly in his memory for many a day. It was the Ware family at supper. And afterward, when the dishes had been cleared away, there was another picture to shine out into the wet night: the children unpacking the box that Jack had dragged out of its hiding-place.

Mary paraded jubilantly around the room in her new slippers, the rosebud sash tied around her gingham apron, the pink parasol held high above her head, and her face such a picture of delight that one could not look at her without smiling, too.

"SHE SORTED THE RIBBONS AND EXAMINED THE GLOVES."

Even the baby sat up an hour after his bedtime, to take part in the unusual excitement. The prospect of Joyce's seeing the old valley seemed to have unlocked a door into the little mother's memory. Story after story she brought out to entertain them, of the things that had happened when she was a care-free little schoolgirl, before sorrow and worry and work had come to make her tired and sad.

While she entertained them Joyce brought a bureau drawer from her bedroom, and, propping it on two chairs, began looking over its contents. She sorted the ribbons and examined the gloves, counted the handkerchiefs and inspected the stockings, dividing everything into three piles. One pile was pronounced suitable to take on the visit, one good enough to wear at home after another renovating, and one altogether past wearing.

"It's a sort of day of judgment," said Jack, who was watching the performance with interest. "You're separating the sheep from the goats; only there's three divisions here, white sheep, black sheep, and goats."

"I love for such days to come," said Mary, falling upon the third pile and bearing it away as her lawful spoils, "for I always get all the goats. Now my dolls can set up a milliner's shop and dry-goods

store with all this stuff that Joyce has thrown away."

"You may take my new umbrella with you, if you want it, Joyce," said Jack. "I haven't used it half a dozen times since I got it Christmas, and you will want to put on style in Kentucky. Your old one is good enough for me to use out here in Plainsville."

"Do you want my blue spotted necktie, sister?" asked Holland, leaning against her and looking up into her face with an anxious little pucker on his forehead. "It's the best one I've got, but you may take it if you want to."

"And maybe —" began Mary, hesitatingly. She stopped an instant, a little struggle evidently going on in her mind. Then she began again, bravely: "Yes, I'll lend it to you if you want it. You may take my new rosebud sash. There!"

A queer little lump came into Joyce's throat as she thanked the children for their generous offers. She accepted the umbrella, but refused the spotted tie and rosebud sash, to the evident relief of their owners, who wanted to be generous, but were glad to be able to keep the part of their wardrobes they most admired.

"It more than doubles the pleasure, doesn't it, mamma," said Joyce, "to have everybody take so much interest in your having a good time? I wonder

if the other girls are having as much fun out of planning for their visit as I am."

"I doubt it," answered Mrs. Ware. "Elizabeth is an orphan, you know, and Eugenia Forbes, with all her wealth, is practically homeless, for there is little home-life in either a boarding-school or a big hotel."

Joyce looked around on the cheerful little group gathered near the lamp, and a sudden mist blurred her sight at thought of leaving them. She would not have exchanged the little brown house and what it held, just then, for a king's palace. Outside in the pitch-darkness of the night the rain beat against the window-panes like some poor beggar imploring to come in; and inside it was so cosy and bright with the warmth and cheer of home-loves and home-lights that Joyce was not sure, after all, that she could leave such a shelter even to be a guest at the Little Colonel's house party.

CHAPTER V.

BETTY REACHES THE "HOUSE BEAUTIFUL."

It was very early in the morning, while the dew was still on the meadows, that Betty fared forth on her pilgrimage. The old farm wagon that was to take her to the railroad station, two miles away, was drawn up to the door before five o'clock. Davy proudly held the reins while his father carried Betty's trunk down-stairs.

Poor, shabby, little, old leather trunk! It was not half full, for there had been small preparation for this visit. Betty had carefully folded the few gingham dresses she possessed, and the new blue and white lawn bought for her to wear to church. There were several stitches to be taken in her plain cotton underwear, and a button to be sewed on her only white ruffled apron.

That was all that she could do to make herself ready, except to put her hair-ribbons and handkerchiefs smoothly into a little diamond-shaped box that had once held toilet soap. Betty felt rich in ribbons "to

tie up her bonnie brown hair," for there were three bows the colour of her curls, and two of red, and one of delicate robin's-egg blue. The last was to wear with the new lawn, and, in order to keep it fresh and fine, it lay wrapped in tissue-paper all week, between the times of its Sunday wearings.

And the handkerchiefs — well, six of them were plain and white, and two had pictures stamped in the corners. One told the story of Red Ridinghood and the other had scenes from Cinderella outlined in blue. They had been Davy's present to her the Christmas before, and he had bought them at Squire Jaynes's store with his own precious pennies.

That was all that Betty had intended to put into her trunk, but when they were in, there was still so much room that she decided to take her books and several of her chief treasures. "They will be safer," she said to herself, and she filled a box with cotton in which to pack some of her breakable keepsakes. She had hesitated some time about taking her scrap-book, an old ledger on whose blank pages she had written many verses. She hardly dared call them poetry, and yet they were dear to her, because they were the outpourings of her lonely little heart.

All the children knew that she "made up rhymes," but only Davy had any knowledge of the old ledger.

He could not understand all the verses she read to him about the wild flowers, and life and death and time, but they jingled pleasantly in his ears, and he made an attentive listener.

"I'll take it," she decided at last, slipping some loose pages in between the covers. "I may want to write something at Locust."

She paused long at the foot of her bed, trying to make up her mind about her godmother's picture, that hung there in a little frame of pine cones.

"I don't know whether to take it or not," she said to Davy, looking up lovingly at the Madonna of her dreams, whose sweet face had been her last greeting at night, and first welcome on waking, for several years. "I hate to leave it behind, but I'll have my real godmother to look at while I'm gone, and it'll seem so nice to have this picture here to smile at me when I get back, as if she was glad I'd come home. I believe I'll leave it."

It was a solemn moment when Betty climbed into the wagon after her trunk had been lifted in at the back, and perched herself on the high spring seat, beside Davy and his father. The other children were drawn up in a line along the porch, to watch her go. She wore one of her every-day dresses of dark blue gingham, and her white sunbonnet, but the

familiar little figure had taken on a new interest to them. They regarded her as some sort of a venturesome Columbus, about to launch on a wild voyage of discovery. None of them had ever been beyond Jaynes's Post-office in their journeyings, and the youngest had not seen even that much of the outside world.

Betty herself could not remember having been on a longer trip than to Livermore, a village ten miles away. There was an excited flutter in her throat as the wagon started forward with a jolt, and she realised that now she was looking her last on safe familiar scenes, and breaking loose from all safe familiar landmarks.

"Good-bye!" she cried again, looking back at the little group on the porch with tears in her eyes.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" they called, in a noisy chorus, repeating the call like a brood of clacking guineas, until the wagon passed out of sight down the lane. The road turned at the church. Betty leaned forward for one more look at the window, on whose sill she had passed so many happy afternoons reading to Davy. The board was still leaning against the house, where she had propped it.

"Good-bye, dear old church," she said softly to herself.

They drove around the corner of the little neglected graveyard, where the headstones gleamed white in the morning sunshine, above the dark, glossy green of the myrtle vines. How peaceful and quiet it seemed. The dew still shone in tiny beads on the cobwebs, spun across the grass, a spicy smell of cedar boughs floated across the road to them, and a dove called somewhere in the distant woodlands. As they passed, a wild rose hung over the gray pickets of the straggling old fence, and waved a spray of pale pink blossoms to them.

"Good-bye," she whispered, turning for one more look at the familiar headstones. They were like old friends; she had wandered among them so often. One held her gaze an instant, with its well-known marble hand, pointing the place in a marble book in which was carved one text. How often she had spelled the words, pointing out the deeply carven letters to Davy: "*Be ye also ready.*"

She had a vague feeling that the headstones knew she was going away and would miss her. "Good-bye," she said to them, too, nodding the white sunbonnet gravely. It seemed a solemn thing to start on such a journey. After leaving the church there was only one more place to bid good-bye, and that was the schoolhouse sitting through its lonely

vacation time in a deserted playground, gone to weeds.

There was no time to spare at the station. Mr. Appleton tied the horses and hurried to have Betty's trunk checked. The shriek of the locomotive coming down the track made Betty turn cold. It was like a great demon thundering toward her. Davy edged closer to her, moved by the strange surroundings to ask a question.

"Say, Betty, ain't you afraid?"

"Yes," she confessed, squeezing the warm little hand in her own, which had suddenly seemed to turn to ice. "My heart is going bump-bump-bump like a scared wild rabbit's; but I keep saying over and over to myself what the python said. Don't you remember in Kaa's hunting? 'A brave heart and a courteous tongue, said he, they shall carry thee far through the jungle, manling.' It can't be such a very big jungle that I'm going into, and godmother will meet me in a few hours. Don't forget me, Davy, while I'm gone."

She stooped to give the little fellow a hug and a kiss on each dimpled cheek, for the train had stopped, and Mr. Appleton was waiting to shake hands and lift her up the steps. Betty stumbled into the first vacant seat she saw, and sat up primly.

afraid to glance behind her. In her lap, tightly clasped by both hands, she held a little old-fashioned basket of brown willow. It had two handles and a lid with double flaps. She carried it because she had no travelling-bag. Her lunch was in that, her pass, five nickels, and the Red Ridinghood handkerchief.

"You can let that be a sort of warning to you," said Mrs. Appleton, at parting, "not to get into conversation with strangers. Red Ridinghood never would have got into trouble if she hadn't stopped to tell the Wolf all she knew."

Remembering this warning, Betty sat up very straight at first, and held the basket handles in such a tight grasp that her fingers ached. But after the conductor had looked at her pass and smiled kindly into the appealing little face under the white sunbonnet, she felt more at ease and began to look shyly about her.

Somebody's grandmother was in the seat in front of her, such a fat, comfortable-looking old lady, that Betty felt sure she could not be a Wolf in disguise, and watched her with neighbourly interest. She fell to wondering about her, where she lived and where she was going, and what she had in her many bags, boxes, shawl-straps, and satchels.

Things were not half so strange as she had ex-

pected them to be. The corn-fields and tobacco-fields and apple-orchards whizzing past the windows were exactly like the ones she had left at home. More than once a meadow full of daisies, gleaming on her sight like drifts of summer snow, made her think of the lower pasture at home, where she had waded through them the day before, waist-deep.

Even the people who came on the cars at the stations along the way looked like the people she saw at church every week, and Betty soon began to feel very much at home. After awhile the train stopped at a junction where she had to wait several hours to make connection with the Louisville train. But even that did not turn out to be a bad experience, as she had feared, for the old lady waited too, and she was as anxious to find a friend as Betty was. So it was not long until the two were talking together as sociably as two old neighbours, and they ate their lunch together with so many exchanges of confidences that they were both surprised when Betty's train came puffing along. They had not imagined the time could fly so fast.

At parting they kissed each other as if they had always been friends, and Betty climbed into the car with a warm glow in her heart at having found such unexpected pleasantness along the way.

"It was silly of me to have been so frightened," she thought. "The world isn't a jungle, after all, and we are just as apt to meet the grandmothers as the wolves when we go travelling."

She was mixing Kaa's experience with Red Riding-hood's in her thought, but it made no difference. The conclusion she reached was a comfortable one. So she leaned back in her seat to enjoy the rest of the journey without any foolish fears.

Little by little the motion of the train had its effect. The white sunbonnet nodded nearer and nearer toward the cushioned back of the seat; the brown eyes drooped drowsily, and in a few minutes Betty was sound asleep. That was the last she knew of the trip that she had settled herself to enjoy, for when she awoke the brakeman was calling "*Louisville!*" at the top of his voice, and people were beginning to reach up to the racks overhead for their bundles.

There was a general uprising of the passengers. The crowd pushed toward the door, carrying the startled child with them as they surged down the aisle, and all at once — as she stepped off the train — she found herself in the depths of her dreaded jungle. It was so confusing she did not know which way to turn. The roar and clang of a great city

smote on her ears as she stood in the big Union depot, helpless, bewildered, and as lost as a stray kitten in the midst of that noisy, pushing crowd. Sharp elbows jostled her this way and that; strange faces streamed past her by thousands, it seemed. How could anybody find anybody else in such a whirlpool of people? Hunting for a needle in a haystack seemed nothing in comparison to finding her godmother in such a crowd.

Betty stood looking around her helplessly in the middle of the overpowering din of whistles and bells and the thunder of wheels on the cobblestones outside. That moment she would have given anything she owned to be safely back on the quiet farm. The big brown eyes in the depths of the sunbonnet filled with tears, but she resolutely winked them back, whispering the python's words: "A brave heart and a courteous tongue, manling."

But she could not stop the frightened thumping in her breast, and of what use was a courteous tongue, when nobody would stop to listen? She wondered what had happened to make a whole city full of people in such a desperate hurry.

Two tears splashed down on the brown willow basket-lid, and then — No telling what would have happened next, had not the jungle opened, without

waiting for a brave heart and a courteous tongue on Betty's part. Coming toward her all in dainty gray and white was a lady she would have recognised anywhere. That face, that had been the Madonna of her dreams, both waking and sleeping, since the first night it had kept its smiling vigil above her little bed, could belong to no one but her beautiful godmother.

With a glad little cry of recognition she sprang forward, catching one slim gray-gloved hand in hers. The white sunbonnet fell back, the brown eyes looked out from a tangle of dusky curls with a world of loving admiration in their depths, and the next instant Betty was folded in Mrs. Sherman's arms.

"Joyce Allen," she exclaimed, "all over again! Joyce's own little daughter! I would have known you anywhere, dear, I think, even —" She did not finish the sentence. Even in such an outlandish costume, was what she had started to say. She had seen Betty as the child stepped off the train, but had not given her a second glance, as it never occurred to her that the little guest she had come to meet would travel in a sunbonnet.

But Betty was blissfully unconscious of her appearance. As they crossed the city to a suburban

depot, she was so interested in the mysteries of the trolley-car on which they rode, so absorbed by the great show-windows they passed, and so amazed by the city sights and sounds on every hand, that she was not conscious of the fact that she even had a head. It might have been bald for all she was concerned about the covering of it.

The Little Colonel was waiting in the carriage at the depot when Mrs. Sherman and Betty stepped off the train at Lloydsboro Valley. Rob Moore had come down, too, curious for a glimpse at the first arrival. He grinned at the expression of surprise and dismay on the Little Colonel's face as her glance fell on Betty. Was it that her little guest had no hat, she wondered, or was it because no one in the cuckoo's nest had ever taught her any better than to go travelling in such style? And carrying a little old-fashioned willow basket, too! How odd and countrified she looked!

But Lloyd was too ladylike to show her disappointment. She climbed out of the carriage and greeted Betty as graciously as her mother had done. Then straightway she forgot her annoyance, for the sweet friendliness of the little face smiling up into hers was irresistible.

"Does the Valley look as you thought it would,

Elizabeth?" asked Mrs. Sherman, as the carriage rolled homeward, past handsome suburban homes with closely cut lawns and trimly kept paths.

"No," said Betty, hesitatingly. "You see I thought you lived in the country, and I suppose it is a sort of country, but not the kind that I live in. Here everything is pruned and raked until it looks as if it had just had its hair parted smoothly in the middle, and its shoe-strings tied. At home there is so much underbrush, and such a tangle of weeds and high grass and briers, that the yards look as if they'd forgotten to comb their hair when they got up, and had gone around all day with it hanging down their backs in snarls."

The Little Colonel laughed. The newcomer had amusing fancies, at any rate.

"And there's the same difference in everything else," continued Betty. "The same difference that there was between Cinderella's pumpkin and her gilded coach. It was a pumpkin all the time, only it looked different after it was bewitched. And do you know," she said, with a charming little burst of confidence that made Lloyd's heart warm toward her, "I began to feel bewitched myself, from the first moment that godmother spoke to me? She called me Elizabeth, and at home I am just plain Betty.

Oh, I think it is perfectly beautiful to have a godmother."

She looked shyly up at the face above her with such a winning smile that Mrs. Sherman drew her toward her with a quick hug and kiss. Lloyd gave a little wriggle of satisfaction. "I'm *so* glad you've come!" she cried, so completely won by Betty's artlessness that she forgot her first impression.

"Heah we are at Locust," she said, as they drove into the long avenue. "I wish you could have seen the trees when they were all in bloom. It was like a picture."

"It is like a picture now, I think," said Betty, gazing up at the giant branches overheard that seemed to be waving a welcome. There was a listening expression on her face, as if she understood their leafy whisperings. Lloyd and her mother exchanged glances, and after that she was disturbed by no word until the carriage stopped. They understood her silent pleasure in the great trees that they themselves had learned to look upon as old friends.

At the house Betty leaned forward for an admiring glance at the tall white pillars, all wreathed and festooned in their green lacework of vines. "Oh, I know this place," she cried. "It is in my 'Pilgrim's Progress,' where Christian stopped awhile

on his way to the City of the Shining Ones. It is the House Beautiful!"

"What odd fancies you have!" exclaimed Lloyd, stepping out of the carriage as she spoke. "But it is dear of you to give the place such a sweet name. Come on up and see your room. After you have rested awhile I'll take you all over the house."

As they went down the wide, airy hall, Betty had a glimpse of the drawing-room through the open doors. In a confused way she noticed mirrors and statuary and portraits, handsome old furniture and rare pieces of bric-a-brac; but one thing caught her attention so that she stood a moment in round-eyed admiration. It was a large harp, whose gracefully curving frame gleamed through the shadowy room like burnished gold. Fair and tall it stood, as if its strings had just been swept by some of the Shining Ones beyond, who were a part of the Pilgrim's dream.

"What did you say?" asked Lloyd, hearing her cry of admiration, and looking back to see Betty standing in the open door with clasped hands. "Oh, that is grandmothah's harp. I am learning to play on it to please grandfathah. I'll teach you some chords while you are heah, if you want me to. Come on."

At the landing where the stairs turned, Betty stopped again, for there was a great casement window looking out into a beech-grove, and under it a cosy cushioned window-seat, where some one had evidently been reading. There were books and magazines scattered all among the pillows.

"Heah is yo' room!" cried Lloyd, throwing open a door at the head of the stairs, and leading the way in. Betty followed, her sunbonnet in her hand, and looked around her like one in a dream. She had never imagined a room could be so beautiful. If Lloyd could have known what a contrast it was to the bare little west gable at the cuckoo's nest, she could have better understood the wonder in Betty's face.

"My room is pink, and Eugenia's green, and Joyce's blue," explained Lloyd. "Mothah thought you would like this white and gold one best, 'cause it's like a daisy field."

Before Betty could express her admiration, Mrs. Sherman came in with an old coloured woman whom she called Mom Beck, and who, she told Betty, had been her own nurse as well as Lloyd's. "And she is anxious to see you," added Mrs. Sherman, "for she remembers your mamma so well. Many a time she helped dress her when she was a little girl no larger than you, and came home with me for a visit

She'll bring you some milk or iced tea, and fix your bath when you are ready for it. We are going to leave you now for a little while and see if you can't have a nice little nap. It has been a long, tiresome journey, and you need the rest more than you realise."

Left to herself, Betty undressed and lay down as she had been bidden. Her eyes were tired and she closed them sleepily, but they would not stay shut. She was obliged to open them for another peep at the dear little white dressing-table with its crystal candlesticks, that looked like twisted icicles. And she must see that darling little heart-shaped pin-cushion again, and all the dainty toilet articles of gold and ivory. Then she could not resist another glance at the white Angora rugs lying on the dark, polished floor, and the white screen before her wash-stand with sprays of goldenrod painted across it, looking as natural as if they had grown there.

Once she got up and pattered across the room in her nightgown to sit a moment before the little writing-desk in the corner, and handle all its dainty furnishings of gold and mother-of-pearl. There were thin white curtains at the windows, held back by broad bands of yellow ribbon. They stirred softly with every passing breeze, and fluttered and fluttered,

until by and by, watching them, Betty's eyelids fluttered, too, and she closed them drowsily.

While she slept she dreamed that she was back in the cuckoo's nest again, in her bare little room in the gable, and that a great white and yellow daisy stood over her, shaking her by the shoulder and telling her that it was time to go down and wash the breakfast dishes. Then the broad white petals began to fall off one by one, and it was Davy's face in the centre. No, whose was it? She rubbed her eyes and looked again, to find her godmother standing in the door.

"It is time to dress for dinner, little girl," she called, gaily. "Do you need any help?"

"No, thank you," answered Betty, sitting up and catching a glimpse of Lloyd going past the door in a fresh white muslin and pink ribbons.

"Shall I wear my best dress, godmother?" asked Betty, "or would it be better to save it for Sunday?"

"Let me see it," said Mrs. Sherman, helping her to take it out of the little half-filled trunk. "Oh, you'd better wear it, I think. We may have company." What she saw in that trunk set her to thinking her most godmotherly thoughts.

The wax tapers were all lighted in each silver candelabra when Betty went down the stairs, looking fresh and sweet as a wildflower in her dress and

ribbons of robin's-egg blue. When she slipped into the long drawing-room, Lloyd was playing on the harp. Over her hung the portrait of a beautiful young girl, also standing beside a harp. She was dressed in white, and she wore a June rose in her hair and another at her throat. Betty walked over and looked up at the picture long and earnestly.

"That's my grandmothah, Amanthis," said Lloyd, pausing in her song, "and that's the way she looked the first time grandfathah evah saw her. And heah's Uncle Tom in his soldier clothes, and this is mothah's great-great-aunt that was such a belle in the days of Clay and Webstah."

She led the way around the room, introducing Betty to all the old family portraits, with interesting tales about each one. Then she went back to her harp, and Betty sat down in front of the first picture again. "You belong to me, too, in a way," thought Betty, looking up at it. "If you are my godmother's mother, then you are my great-godmother, Amanthis, and I love you because you are so beautiful."

The harp thrilled on, the fair face of the portrait seemed to smile back at her, and in some vague, sweet way Betty felt that she had come back to her own and had been welcomed home to the House Beautiful.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENCHANTED NECKLACE.

SEVERAL days after Betty's arrival, the Little Colonel went into her mother's room with a troubled face.

"Mothah," she said, anxiously, "what are we goin' to do about the lawn fête at Anna Moore's this afternoon? Elizabeth hasn't a thing to weah but that lawn dress that she has put on every evenin' since she came, and it isn't fresh enough. I can't lend her anything because I'm not quite as tall as she is, and my clothes would be too short. What is she goin' to do?"

"Ah, that is my secret, little daughter," answered Mrs. Sherman, with a smile. "What do you suppose I spent that hot morning in town for, the day after she came, and why, do you think, have I driven over so many times to see Miss Dean? I have made at least six trips there."

"Was it to get some clothes made for Elizabeth?" asked Lloyd. A little expression of doubt showed

in the anxious pucker of her forehead. "But, mothah, she is awfully proud if she is poah. Aren't you afraid of hurtin' her feelin's?"

"There are a great many ways of giving gifts, little daughter. If I provided her with clothes in a way to make her feel that I thought hers were too mean to be worn in my house, and that I was ashamed to have a guest of mine present such an appearance, that would naturally hurt her pride; but I have thought of a way that I am sure will please her. If you will call her up-stairs in a few minutes, I will show you. Where is she now?"

"Readin' on the stair landin'. At least she was when I came up. She was in the window-seat."

"Then wait until I take something into her room. I'll tell you when I am ready, and you may call her up."

Lloyd hung over the banister in the upper hall until she heard a whispered "Ready;" then she called: "Come up heah, Elizabeth, mothah wants us a minute in yo' room."

Mrs. Sherman was sitting by an open window with some sewing in her lap, when Lloyd and Betty skipped into the white and gold room. Betty had a book in her hand with her finger between the closed pages, to keep the place.

"BETTY BEGAN THE STORY."

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Sherman, "do you remember the story of the enchanted necklace that was in a book of fairy tales I sent you once?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Betty. "That is one of my favourite stories. I have read it twenty times, I am sure, and told it to Davy until he almost knows it by heart."

"I wish you would tell it to Lloyd, please. She has never heard it, and I want to illustrate it for her after awhile."

The little girl willingly dropped down into a big chair full of cushions, and with her finger still marking the place in the book, Betty began the story:

"Once upon a time, near a castle in a lonely wood, there lived an orphan maiden named Olga. She would have been all alone in the world had it not been for an old woman who befriended her. This woman was an old flax-spinner, and lived in a humble thatched cottage near the castle. She had taken pity on Olga when the little orphan was a helpless baby, and so kind had she always been that Olga had grown to maidenhood without feeling the lack of father, mother, brother, or sister. In all ways the old flax spinner had taken their places.

"Every morning Olga carried water from the spring, gathered the wild fruits of the woods, and spread the

linen on the grass to bleach. This she did to help the old woman, for she had a good and grateful heart as well as a beautiful face.

"One day as Olga was wandering by the spring, searching for watercresses, the young prince of the castle rode by on his prancing charger. A snow-white plume waved in his hat, and a shining silver bugle hung from his shoulder, for he had been following the chase.

"He was thirsty and tired, and asked for a drink, but there was no cup from which to dip the water from the spring. But Olga caught the drops as they bubbled out from the spring, holding it in the hollow of her beautiful white hands, and, reaching up to where he sat, offered him the sparkling water. So gracefully was it done that the prince was charmed by her lovely face and modest manner, and, baring his head, when he had slaked his thirst he touched the white hands with his lips.

"Before he rode away he asked her name and where she lived. The next day a courier in scarlet and gold stopped at the door of the cottage and invited Olga to the castle. Princesses and royal ladies from all over the realm were to be entertained there, seven days and seven nights. Every night a grand ball was to be given, and Olga was summoned to each

of the balls. It was on account of her pleasing manner and her great beauty that she had been bidden.

"The old flax-spinner curtsied low to the courier and promised that Olga should be at the castle without fail.

"'But, good dame,' cried Olga when the courier had gone, 'prithee tell me why thou didst make such a promise, when thou knowest full well this gown of tow is all I own? Wouldst have me stand before the prince in beggar's garb? Better to bide at home for aye than be put to shame before such guests.'

"'Have done, my child,' the old dame said. 'Thou shalt wear a court robe of the finest. Years have I toiled to give it thee, but that is naught. I loved thee as my own.'

"Then the old dame went into an inner room and pricked herself with her spindle until a great red drop of her heart's blood fell into her trembling hand. With witchery of words she blew upon it, and rolled it in her palm, and muttering, turned and turned and turned it. And as the spell was laid upon it, it shrivelled it into a tiny round ball like a seed, and she strung it on to a thread where were many others like it. Seventy times seven was the number of beads on

this strange rosary. Then she laid it away until the time when it should be needed.

"When the night of the first ball rolled around, Olga combed her long golden hair and twined it with a wreath of snowy water-lilies, and then she stood before the old dame in her dress of tow. To her wonderment and grief she saw the old flax-spinner had no silken robe in waiting, only a string of beads which she clasped around Olga's white throat. Each bead in the necklace looked like a little shrivelled seed, and Olga's eyes were filled with tears of disappointment.

"'Obey me and all will be well,' said the old dame. 'When thou reachest the castle gate clasp one bead in thy fingers and say:

> "'"For love's sweet sake, in my hour of need,
> Blossom and deck me, little seed."

"'Straightway, right royally shalt thou be clad. Thou hast been a good daughter to me, and thus I reward thee. But remember carefully the charm. Only to the magic words, "For love's sweet sake," will the necklace give up its treasures. If thou shouldst forget, then must thou be doomed alway to bear thy gown of tow.'

"So Olga sped on her moon-lighted way through

the forest until she came to the castle gate. There she paused, and grasping a bead of the strange necklace between her fingers, repeated the old dame's charm:

> "'For love's sweet sake, in my hour of need,
> Blossom and deck me, little seed.'

"Immediately the bead burst with a little puff, as if a seed pod had snapped asunder. A faint perfume surrounded her, rare and subtle as if it had been blown across from some flower of Eden. Olga looked down and found herself enveloped in a robe of such delicate texture that it seemed soft as a rose leaf, and as airy as the pink clouds that sometimes float across the sunset. The water-lilies in her hair had become a coronal of opals.

"When she entered the great ballroom, the prince of the castle started up from his throne in amazement. Never before had he seen such a vision of loveliness. 'Surely,' said he, 'some rose of Paradise hath found a soul and drifted earthward to blossom here.' And all that night he had eyes for none but her.

"The next night Olga started again to the castle in her dress of tow, and at the gate she grasped the second bead in her fingers, repeating the charm

This time the pale yellow of the daffodils seemed to have woven itself into a cloth of gold for her adorning. It was like a shimmer of moonbeams, and her hair held the diamond flashings of a hundred tiny stars.

"That night the prince paid her so many compliments and singled her out so often to bestow his favours, that Olga's head was turned. She tossed it proudly, and quite scorned the thought of the humble cottage which had given her shelter so long. The next day, when she had returned to her gown of tow, and was no longer a haughty court lady, but only Olga, the flax-spinner's maiden, she repined at her lot. Frowning she carried the water from the spring. Frowning she gathered the cresses and plucked the woodland fruit. And then she sat all day by the spring, refusing to spread the linen on the grass to bleach.

"She was discontented with the old life of toil, and pouted crossly because duties called her when she wanted to do nothing but sit idly dreaming of the gay court scenes in which she had taken a bright, brief part. The old flax-spinner's fingers trembled as she spun, when she saw the frowns, for she had given of her heart's blood to buy happiness for the maiden she loved, and well she knew there can be no

happiness where frowns abide. She felt that her years of sacrifice had been in vain.

"That night outside the castle gate Olga paused. She had forgotten the charm. The day's discontent had darkened her memory as storm clouds darken the sky. But she grasped her necklace imperiously.

"'Deck me at once!' she cried, in a haughty tone. 'Clothe me more beautifully than mortal maid was ever clad before, so that I may find favour in the prince's sight and become the bride of the castle. I would that I were done for ever with the spindle and the distaff.'

"But the moon went under a cloud and the wind began to moan around the turrets. The black night hawks in the forests flapped their wings warningly, and the black bats flitted low around her head.

"'Obey me at once!' she cried, angrily, stamping her foot and jerking at the necklace. But the string broke and the beads went rolling away in the darkness in every direction, and were lost. All but one, which she held clasped in her hand.

"Then Olga wept at the castle gate; wept outside in the night and the darkness, in her beggar's garb of tow. But after awhile, through her sobbing, stole the answering sob of the night wind. 'Hush-sh!'

it seemed to say. 'Sh-sh! Never a heart can come to harm, if the lips but speak the old dame's charm.'

"The voice of the night wind sounded so much like the voice of the old flax-spinner that Olga was startled and looked around wonderingly. Then suddenly she seemed to see the little thatched cottage and the bent form of the lonely old woman at the wheel. All the years in which the good dame had befriended her seemed to rise up in a row, and out of each one called a thousand kindnesses as with one voice: 'How canst thou forget us, Olga? We were done for thee, for love's sweet sake and that alone.'

"Then was Olga sorry and ashamed that she had been so proud and forgetful, and she wept again. The tears seemed to clear her vision, for now she saw plainly that through no power of her own could she wrest strange favours from fortune. Only the power of the old charm could make them hers. She remembered it then, and holding fast to the one bead in her hand, she repeated, humbly:

> "'For love's sweet sake, in my hour of need,
> Blossom and deck me, little seed.'

"Lo, as the words left her lips, the moon shone out from behind the clouds above the dark forest.

There was a fragrance of lilies all about her, and a gossamer gown floated around her, whiter than the whiteness of the fairest lily. It was fine, like the finest lace that the frost-elves weave, and softer than the softest ermine of the snow. On her long golden hair gleamed a coronet of pearls.

"So beautiful, so dazzling was she as she entered the castle door, that the prince came down to meet her, and kneeling, kissed her hand, and claimed her as his bride. Then came the bishop in his mitre, and led her to the throne, and before them all the flax-spinner's maiden was married to the prince, and made the Princess Olga.

"Then, until the seven days and seven nights were done, the revels lasted in the castle. And in the merriment the old flax-spinner was again forgotten. Her kindness of the past, her loneliness in the present, had no part in the thoughts of the Princess Olga.

"But the beads that had rolled away into the darkness buried themselves in the earth, and took root and sprang up. There at the castle gate they bloomed, a strange, strange flower, for on every stem hung a row of little bleeding hearts.

"One day the Princess Olga, seeing them from her window, went down to them in wonderment.

'What do you here?' she cried, for in her lonely forest life she had learned all speech of bird and beast and plant.

"'We bloom for love's sweet sake,' they answered. 'We have sprung from the old flax-spinner's gift, — the necklace thou didst break and scatter. From her heart's best blood she gave it, and her heart still bleeds to think she is forgotten.'

"Then they began to tell the story of the old dame's sacrifices, all the seventy times seven that she had made for the sake of the maiden, and Olga grieved as she listened, that she could have been so ungrateful. Then she brought the prince to listen to the story of the strange, strange flowers, and when he had heard, together they went to the lowly cottage and fetched the old flax-spinner to the castle, there to live out all her days.

"And still the flowers that we call bleeding hearts bloom on by cottage walls and castle gardens, reminding us how often 'tis through hearts that bleed for love's sweet sake we reach our happiness."

Betty came to the end of the story and paused, smiling, while the Little Colonel, who had listened with one arm around her mother's neck, waited for what was to follow.

Mrs. Sherman took up a little box that had

been lying in her lap under the sewing, and lifted something out of the jeweller's cotton it contained.

"Elizabeth," she asked, motioning the child toward her, "do you suppose the Princess Olga's necklace was anything like this?" What she held up was a string of little gold beads.

"Oh, they are almost like mine," cried Lloyd, fingering them admiringly. Before Betty realised what was coming, she found them clasped on her neck, and Mrs. Sherman was saying: "It isn't made out of my heart's blood by any means, and it will not lead you to any Prince Charming, but it is my privilege as godmother to lay a spell on them. Let's see how it will work. Go over to that little trunk of yours in the corner, dear, and lay your hand on it. Now shut your eyes while you repeat Olga's charm, and see what will happen."

Delighted by this dramatising of the old tale, Betty scrambled to her feet, ran across the room, and laid her hand on top of the shabby little leather trunk. Shutting her eyes so tight that her nose wrinkled up like a kitten's, while her mouth smiled broadly, she repeated the rhyme:

> "For love's sweet sake, in my hour of need,
> Blossom and deck me, little seed!"

As she opened her eyes, Lloyd, obeying a whisper from her mother, threw back the lid of the trunk. All that Betty could utter, as she looked within, was a long-drawn cry of surprise: "Oh-oo-oo!"

There, inside, lay a pile of light summer dresses, some white, and the rest in as many tints of pale pinks and blues and buffs and lilacs as could be found in a bunch of fresh sweet peas. Below were glimpses of linen and lace and embroidery, and in the top tray two pretty hats. One trimmed simply with rosettes of ribbon, the other a broad-brimmed leghorn with a wreath of forget-me-nots.

One look into Betty's face was enough reward for Mrs. Sherman. It was ample return for all the trouble she had taken. What was the money expended and the discomforts of that tiresome morning that she shopped in town, or the many trips to the dressmaker's, compared to the rapture in Betty's shining eyes? Mrs. Sherman had never seen such happiness, or heard such a gladness in a voice as when Betty cried out, "Oh, godmother! Are you a witch? It is too good to be true. I thought I was coming to an ordinary house party, and I've walked straight into a real, live fairy tale! Oh, I can never thank you enough! Never, never, never." She

threw her arms around her godmother's neck and kissed her again and again.

Presently leaving Betty to gloat over her treasures by herself, Lloyd followed Mrs. Sherman out of the room. "Now I see what you meant, mothah," she said, "about the different ways of givin' things. It can't hurt anybody's pride if you make them feel that you give it for love's sweet sake. That was a beautiful way you did it, mothah, and I'll never fo'get it."

CHAPTER VII.

BITS FROM BETTY'S DIARY.

"THE LOCUSTS," June 4, 1900.

THIS morning when I sat down at my writing-desk to finish a letter to Davy, I found this little blank book, bound in white kid, with my initials on the back in gold letters. When I first came, godmother heard me wishing that I could put a slice of my good times away in a box every day, and save it to take home and enjoy afterward, as people do fruit-cake sometimes, after Christmases and weddings. So she has given me this pretty white book, and every day while I am in this House Beautiful I shall write something in it with this darling little pearl-handled pen.

Even if I should live to be a grandmother, I am sure I shall never be too old to enjoy reading the account of what we did at this house party. So far I am the only guest. The others will be here in a few days. They have so much farther to travel than I had.

Cousin Hetty would say that I "am eating my white bread now," for it is nothing but play from morning until night.

At first it seemed so strange, — no beds to make, no dishes to wash, no churning to do. I like the evenings best of all. Then we sit on the porch in the twilight, and godmother talks about mamma. I never knew anything about her before, for I was so little when she died; but now she seems so real to me and so sweet.

Then we go into the long drawing-room, and the wax tapers are lighted. Godmother says she always intends to use candle-light in that room, because it would spoil some of its quaint old-time charm to use modern lights. And she plays on the piano, and Lloyd on the harp. Lloyd is only learning, and godmother doesn't seem to think much of her playing, but to me the music they make seems almost heavenly. They forget that the only music that I am used to hearing, except what the birds make, is pumped out of the wheezy little organ at church.

I could sit up all night to listen to them. It makes me feel so strange that I hardly know how to describe it, — as if I were away off from everything, and high up, where it is wide and open, and where the stars are. It makes me want to write. All

sorts of beautiful thoughts come to me, that I can *almost* put into words. But they are like will-o'-the-wisps. When I get to the place with my rhyme, where I saw them shining, they are still beyond my reach.

JUNE 5th.

Rob Moore came over to-day, and he and Lloyd and I went fishing.

We carried our lunch with us, and ate it on a big rock that sticks up like a sort of island in the middle of the creek. We had to take off our shoes and stockings to wade out to it, and after we got there the rock was hardly big enough to hold the basket and all of us comfortably. We had to hold fast with one hand and grab for our sandwiches with the other.

It was lots of fun, for Rob and Lloyd kept saying such funny things that we laughed all the time. I don't know how it happened, but we got to laughing so hard that Lloyd choked on a piece of chicken. We began pounding her on the back to help her get her breath, and all of a sudden off we went from the rock into the creek — kersplash!

It wasn't deep enough to hurt us, but we did look so funny when we stood up as wet as three frogs, and wiped the water out of our eyes. We laughed so hard we could scarcely fish the basket out of the

creek and wade to shore. The basket was the only thing we caught except a turtle; Rob got that, and Lloyd made him let it go again.

Of course our tumble into the water ended the fishing for to-day, for we all had to hurry home for dry clothes. But Rob came back again in the afternoon, and he and Lloyd have been giving me my first lesson in lawn-tennis.

JUNE 6th.

Joyce came to-day on the noon train. She has the blue room across the hall from mine. It suits her, for she is a blonde like Lloyd, but her hair doesn't curl any. It is just soft and wavy, and hangs in two long braids below her waist. Her eyes are gray, with long dark lashes, and while she isn't exactly pretty, she has a face that you like to keep looking at. It is so bright and jolly, as if she was always thinking funny things, and having a good time all to herself.

She came all the way alone, and didn't mind it a bit, although she had to change cars twice, and was all night on the sleeping-car. She brought a sketch-book in her satchel that is almost full of pictures she drew on the train. There is one that is so funny. It is the head of an old man, gone to sleep with his mouth open. She wrote under that one, "As others

see us." Then she drew two cunning babies playing peek-a-boo in the aisle. She called that "Innocence abroad." There are ever so many more that godmother says are really clever, and remarkably well done for a girl of thirteen. I thought they were perfect.

It didn't take long to get acquainted with Joyce. She has been here only a part of a day, and already I feel as if I had known her always.

JUNE 7th.

It was nearly six o'clock yesterday when Eugenia came. Godmother and Lloyd drove down to the station to meet her, but Joyce and I walked up and down under the locusts, wondering what she would be like.

We could hardly wait for the carriage to come, we were so eager to know. I couldn't tell what it was about her, but somehow, when she stepped out of the carriage and shook hands with us, she made me feel awkward and shy and out of place. Maybe it was because she had such a grown-up manner and seemed so young-ladified, although she is only Joyce's age. Then she spoke in such a superior sort of way to her maid, when she ordered her to follow up-stairs with the satchels.

They went straight to the green room to dress

for dinner, and Joyce and I locked arms again, and strolled down to the gate. Joyce asked me what I thought of her. I told her that I would be thankful to the end of time that I got here first. Seeing her arrive in such a stylish travelling suit, gloves, and Knox hat, and carrying such a handsome leather bag, opened my eyes to the way I must have looked when I came. It tickled Joyce, the way I described myself, travelling in a sunbonnet and carrying my belongings in an old-fashioned willow basket.

She gave my chin a soft nip and kissed me on each cheek, and said, "You funny little Bettykins! As if it made any difference to your friends what you wore."

I told her I believed it would make a difference to Eugenia, and she thought, too, that maybe it might. Then I told her I believed that was why godmother gave me the enchanted necklace before she came, so that I wouldn't feel uncomfortable. Joyce had not heard about the necklace, so I showed her my gold beads and told her their story. She thought it was lovely of godmother to make the fairy tale come true, but she advised me not to tell Eugenia. Girls who always travel in private cars and have everything they wish for, she said, can't understand what it means to be poor. Then she told me about a box

that her Cousin Kate had sent her, and how good it made everybody in the little brown house feel, when it came.

JUNE 8th.

We had the grandest surprise this morning. Lloyd came up to the house soon after breakfast, on Tar-baby, leading her mother's riding horse, a graceful little bay mare. Behind her came one of the coloured men leading two ponies, so that we could all have a ride. The bay mare was for Eugenia, who is a fine horsewoman. She learned in a New York riding-school. The ponies were for Joyce and me. Mr. Sherman had them sent out from Louisville after he went away, for us to use all the time we are here.

One of the ponies is named Calico, because he is marked so queerly. His hair grows in such funny little streaks and stripes and patches that he looks as if he had been painted that way on purpose. He was a clown pony in a circus one time, and is supposed to know a lot of tricks. Joyce wanted him because he is so gentle, and she had never ridden any before. She didn't mind his ridiculous looks. So Lad fell to my share, — a pretty brown one that is as easy as a rocking-horse after the stiff-jointed old farm-horses that I am used to bouncing around on at home.

They were all ready to start, so we went galloping down to Judge Moore's after Rob, and the five of us raced all over the valley till nearly lunch-time. It was grand. The dust flew, and people ran to the windows when we went by, as if we had been a circus.

We did have a sort of circus when we passed by Taylor's grove. A Butchers' Union had come out from town for a big picnic, and they had a brass band with them. It struck up a waltz just as we reached the grove, and Joyce's pony, Calico, began turning around and around as if he had lost his senses. Joyce screamed and threw her arms around his neck, frightened almost to death until Rob called out that Calico was dancing, and for her to hang on and see what he would do. What he did was to stand on his hind legs and dump Joyce off into the middle of the road.

She sat there in the dust, too astonished to move, until Rob helped her up, and then they both leaned against the fence to laugh at Calico's antics. He was so funny. He kept up his performances until the music stopped. Then he walked over to Rob and held up his fore foot to shake hands, as if he wanted to be congratulated. The music of the band seemed to have brought back all his old tricks to his

memory. I didn't suppose that Joyce would mount him again, but she did. Rob called to the men and asked them please not to play again until we were out of hearing, and we rode off.

JUNE 9th.

I don't believe that I could ever love Eugenia very dearly, because she makes me feel uncomfortable so often. She has a way of looking down on you that would rile anybody. But she is a fascinating sort of girl, when she wants to be friendly and entertaining. We have been in her room all morning, listening to her talk.

It must be grand to live in one of the biggest hotels in the world, and see all the sights she sees. I imagine it is a sort of a palace. She showed us the picture of her three best friends at school. It is in a big silver locket set with sapphires, and hangs over a corner of her mirror. We heard a great deal of them this morning. She seems to think more of that Mollie and Fay and Kell than she does of her father.

It is funny that when you are with Eugenia you can't help feeling the same way she does about what she's telling; that it is right to break the rules and skip recitations and torment the teachers and play jokes on the girls not in their set. She seems to

have a great influence over Lloyd. I don't believe godmother would like it if she knew how much. Already Lloyd has promised to tease her father and mother into letting her go to New York next fall, to enter Eugenia's school. She told us that it is very select, and said, "You know sometimes schools that advertise themselves as being awfully select are no better than those horrid public scchools, for they take anybody who applies, no matter how common they are."

Joyce asked her why she called public schools horrid, and she answered in such a disgusted, patronising way, "Oh, nobody who *is* anybody would go to a public school."

That made Joyce mad, and she told her that she went to one and that she was proud of it; that where she lived public schools were considered better than the private ones. They had better teachers and more progressive methods; and she said she wouldn't give up the Plainsville High School for all the select seminaries in New York.

Then Eugenia drawled in *such* a bored tone, "Oh, *wouldn't* you! Well, maybe *you* wouldn't, being from the West, you know. I've always heard it spoken of out there as wild and woolly, and I suppose it is all a matter of taste."

Then she gave a provoking little laugh, and began to hum a tune, as if public schools and people who went to them were too common for her to think about. Joyce looked out of the window with a sort of don't-care expression, and said something in French. Of course I couldn't understand it, but she told me afterward that it was a well-known proverb about the opinion of a wise fool.

Eugenia was so astonished! She did not know that Joyce can speak French. She has a way of using it herself all the time when she talks. She is always throwing in a French word or sentence that Lloyd and I can't understand. Joyce laughed about it to me the first day she came, and said Eugenia is just as apt to use the wrong word as the right one. This was the first time that Joyce had spoken French, and Eugenia was so surprised she couldn't help showing it, and asked her why she had never said anything before in that language. Joyce told her that her teacher never allowed her to mix the languages. She said it was in bad taste to do so in speaking to people who only understood one; that it seemed affected, or as if the person wanted to show off how much she knew.

Then that made Eugenia mad, and she asked her in a spiteful way if it was a public school teacher

that told her that, and said she didn't know that they taught French out West. Joyce said yes, that they did, but that of course a year abroad was quite a help, and that before she left France they told her that her accent was quite Parisian.

That took the wind out of Eugenia's sails. She did not know that Joyce had been abroad. She is crazy to go herself, but that is the one thing that her father will not humour her in. He says that she must wait until she is older, and he has time to go with her himself. All her friends have been, and it seemed to mortify her that Joyce was ahead of her there. She hasn't put on any airs with Joyce since, although she still does with me.

This is a great deal of nonsense to write in my "Good times" book, but I have put it in to explain why we have paired off as we have. Joyce and I go together now, and Eugenia and Lloyd. Eugenia flatters her all the time, and never says hateful things to her as she does to us, and Lloyd thinks that Eugenia is perfection.

Some letters came this afternoon, — a whole handful for Eugania, written on handsome linen paper and sealed with pretty monogram seals. I had a letter, too. The first one since I have been here. It was from Davy, and printed in big tipsy letters that straggled

all over the page. There were only a few lines, but I knew how long the little fellow must have worked over them, gripping the pencil tight in his hard little fist. I was so proud of it, Davy's first letter, that I passed it around for the girls to see. Lloyd and Joyce were interested and amused, and laughed as I had done over the dear crooked letters; but Eugenia was in one of her high and mighty moods, and she only lifted those black eyebrows in that indifferent way of hers, and tossed it back.

"What awfully queer letter-paper," she said. "*Ruled!* I didn't know that anybody ever wrote on ruled paper nowadays, but servants. Eliot always does, but it's so common to use it, you know."

I could hardly keep the tears back to have her make fun of poor little Davy's letter. For a few minutes I was so homesick that I wished I was back with Davy in the plain old farmhouse, where it doesn't make any difference whether there are lines on your paper or not, or any such silly things as that. Everybody uses ruled paper there, for that matter, because Squire Jaynes doesn't sell any other kind. What difference does it make, anyhow, I should like to know?

I went off to my own room with the letter, and Joyce followed me and found me crying. She made

a face out of the window at Eugenia, and told me never to mind what anybody said. There was a big wide world outside of Eugenia's set with its silly airs and graces, and sensible people made fun of them. Then she offered to illustrate my answer to Davy's letter, and drew a picture of Calico and Lad at the top of the page, and Lloyd's parrot at the bottom. That reminded me to tell him some funny things the parrot had said, and in writing them I got over my homesickness.

Eugenia has a crest on her paper, because some one of her great-great-great-grandfathers, almost back to Noah, was a lord. But it doesn't make her remember to act like a lady. She ought to be made to learn the lines that were in my copy-book once:

> "Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GYPSY FORTUNE-TELLER.

THERE had fallen a pause in the round of merry-makings. After a week of picnics and fishing-parties, lawn fêtes and tennis tournaments, there came a day for which no special entertainment had been planned. It was a hot morning, and the girls were out under the trees: Betty in the swing, with a book in her lap, as usual, Joyce on a camp-stool near by, making a sketch of her, and Eugenia swinging idly in a hammock.

The Little Colonel had been swinging with her, but something had called her to the house, and a deep silence fell on the little group after her departure. Betty, lost in her book, and Joyce, intent on her sketch, did not seem to notice it, but presently Eugenia sat up in the hammock and gave her pillow an impatient thump.

"Whew! how deadly stupid it is here!" she exclaimed. "I'm glad that I don't have to live in the country the year round! Nothing to do — nothing

"'I'M GLAD THAT I DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN THE COUNTRY THE YEAR ROUND!'"

to see — I'd turn to a vegetable in a little while and strike root. I wish something exciting would happen, for I'm bored stiff."

Betty looked up from her story in astonishment. "Why, I think it is lovely here!" she cried. "I'd never get tired of Locust in a hundred years!"

Eugenia smiled, a pitying, amused sort of smile that brought a flush to Betty's cheek. There was a tinge of a sneer in it that seemed to say, "Oh, you poor thing, of course *you* like it. You have never known any better."

Betty's eyes went back to her book again. Eugenia, thrusting one little foot from a mass of pink ruffles, gave an impatient push against the ground with the toe of her slipper, which set the hammock to swinging violently.

"Ho-hum!" she yawned, discontently. "I wish that we could go down to the gypsy camp that we passed yesterday."

"So do I," agreed Joyce. "It looked so picturesque with the tents and the white covered wagons, and that old crone bending over the camp fire. I know a woman at home who had her fortune told by a gypsy, and every single thing that was told her came true."

"I wonder how they can tell," said Eugenia.

"By the lines in their hands. It is as plain as the alphabet to some people. They can tell how long you're going to live, whether you'll be married or not, and what sort of a future you're to have. They say that there are some lines in your hand that mean wealth, and some health, and there are stars for success and crosses for losses and all sorts of signs."

"Oh, how interesting!" cried Betty, again pausing in her story, and spreading out her little brown hands, to examine them. Eugenia held up one of her slim palms, and studied it intently, tracing the lines with a tapering white forefinger.

"Here's a star in my hand," she cried, excitedly, "and all sorts of queer lines and marks that I never noticed before. I wonder which is the marriage line. Oh, girls, I'm just wild to have my fortune told. Let's ride down to the camp before lunch."

"Costs too much," said Joyce, holding her sketch off at arm's length and studying the effect through half-shut eyes. "Rob Moore said that his brother Edward went over to the camp with a party, several nights ago, and they had to pay a dollar apiece. That bars me out, for dollars don't grow on bushes at my house. Besides, Bob said his brother said that they are not real gypsies. The people around here think they are a set of strolling horse thieves. Mister

Edward says that the old woman looks like a Florida cracker, and talks like one too, but she vows that she is the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and was born on the banks of the Nile."

"That settles it!" cried Eugenia, "I am going." She turned the sparkling rings on her finger and watched them reflect the light as she spoke. "We'll all go. It will be my treat. I haven't touched my allowance since I've been here, and papa gave me ten dollars more than usual this month. There isn't any place to spend money here but at the grocery and meat shop, and it's burning a hole in my purse. Only four dollars for all of us. That isn't very much."

"Only four dollars," thought Betty, lifting startled eyes, and thinking of the five nickels with which she had set forth on her journey. It seemed a fortune.

"Say that you will go," insisted Eugenia. "I'll think you're mean things if you don't, for it will give me more pleasure to take you than anything I can possibly think of."

"Yes, I'll be glad to go," said Joyce. "It is awfully sweet of you to stand treat, Eugenia."

"I think so, too," exclaimed Betty, adding her thanks. Joyce rose, gathering up her sketching materials.

"Are you going to the house?" asked Eugenia. "Then ask Lloyd if she won't send word to Alec to saddle the ponies, and tell her we want her to take a short ride with us before lunch. Don't say where we are going. We'll surprise her."

"All right," answered Joyce, moving off down the path.

"And Joyce," called Eugenia after her, "please tell Eliot to brush my hat and put some new laces in my boots. I'll be there by the time the ponies are at the house. Don't you think it will be fun?" she added, turning to Betty, when they were left alone. In the rôle of Lady Bountiful she felt very friendly and gracious.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Betty. "I think it will be perfectly lovely. It is so generous of you, Eugenia, to spend so much for our pleasure!"

"Oh, that's nothing," answered Eugenia, loftily. "Plenty more where that came from."

On the way to the house, Joyce met Mrs. Sherman driving toward her in a dog-cart. "Do you want to drive down to the post-office with me?" she asked. "There is room for one more."

Joyce shook her head and walked on, singing gaily, over her shoulder, "Other fish to fry, so it can't be I. Thank you kindly, ma'am!"

"Eugenia, Elizabeth, do either of you want to go?" Mrs. Sherman asked, stopping the dog-cart beside the hammock.

"No, I believe not, thank you," said Eugenia, languidly. "It's so hot this morning."

Betty's mouth and eyes both opened in astonishment at the excuse Eugenia gave, and her godmother smiled at the sight.

"Well, Elizabeth," she said, playfully, "I see that you are not going to leave me in the lurch. I knew that I wouldn't have to go begging far for company."

"Oh, I'd love to go, godmother," cried Betty, "if it was only any other time. But I've just been invited to ride over to the gypsy camp with the girls."

"To the gypsy camp!" echoed Mrs. Sherman, in surprise. "Why are you going there?"

"To have our fortunes told," answered the unsuspicious child, adding, gratefully, "Isn't it good of Eugenia? She is going to pay for all of us."

A smothered exclamation broke from Eugenia's lips, and she darted an angry look at Betty. There was a shadow of annoyance on Mrs. Sherman's face as she saw it.

"But you mustn't go there," she said. "I am sorry to have to disappoint you, but I couldn't think for a moment of allowing Lloyd to go there. They

are a rough, low set of people, — gamblers and horse thieves. It wouldn't be proper for you little girls to go near them. I intended to mention the matter to Lloyd when I first heard that they had camped in the Valley, and tell her to avoid taking you on any of the roads leading to the camp. But I forgot it until you had ridden away. It would have worried me all the time you were out had I not known that Lloyd is a discreet child for her age, and she heard so much said about them when they were here last summer. I have never thought to mention it since that first day."

"I'm *so* sorry," said Eugenia; "I had set my heart on having my fortune told."

"Mrs. Sherman tapped the wheel of the dog-cart with the lash of her whip, and sat considering. Presently she said, "Of course there isn't any truth in the fortunes they tell. One person knows just as much about the future as another. But I am sorry for your disappointment, for I know at your age such things are entertaining. How would it do for me to call at Miss Allison MacIntyre's while I am out, and ask her to come up to dinner to-night? She is a great friend of mine and knows enough about palmistry to tell some very interesting fortunes. She can amuse young people better than any one I ever knew.

Her two nephews, Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre, came out from Louisville for a short visit yesterday, and I'll invite them, too. They are jolly boys, and I'm sure you will find them far more entertaining than any of the gypsies. What do you say to that plan? Will it make up for the disappointment?"

"Yes, indeed!" answered Betty, and Eugenia smiled her approval, for she had heard Lloyd talk about the MacIntyre boys, and had been hoping to see them. But when Mrs. Sherman had driven on, she turned to Betty with an angry face.

"Tattletale," she said, in a sneering tone. "Why did you go and spoil everything? If you had kept still we could have gone and nobody would have been the wiser. Now it will be no end of trouble to get there without her finding it out."

"You don't mean that you are going after all that godmother has said?" cried Betty, with a look of horror in her big brown eyes. "Why, a wild Arab wouldn't treat his host with such disrespect as that after he'd eaten his salt."

Eugenia's black eyes flashed dangerously. "Yes, Miss Prunes and Prisms, I am going, I don't care what you say. I have made up my mind to have my fortune told by the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, that was born on the banks of the Nile,

and all the king's horses and all the king's men can't make me change it again. It is foolish of Cousin Elizabeth to be so particular, and I am going to do as I please. I always do at home, no matter what papa says. I've never had to mind anybody all my life, and I'll certainly not begin it now that I am in my teens. It is all nonsense about it not being proper for us to go to the camp. Cousin Elizabeth is mighty nice and sweet, but she's an old fogy to talk that way. And she needn't think she has stopped me. I may not get there to-day, but I'll go to that camp before I go back to New York if it's the last thing I do."

She sprang out of the hammock and walked haughtily down the path, her head held high, and her pink ruffles switching angrily from side to side. Betty followed at a safe distance, reaching the house in time to see Joyce and Lloyd come down, ready for their ride. She would have made some excuse to stay at home if she thought that Eugenia intended to carry out her plans at once; but thinking she would surely not attempt it until a later day, she mounted with the others and started down the avenue.

At the gate, as they turned into the public road, they spied a noisy little cavalcade racing down the

pike toward them. Rob Moore led the charge, and two strangers were following hard behind.

"It's the MacIntyre boys," exclaimed the Little Colonel, shading her eyes with her hand and then half turning in her saddle to explain to the girls. "It's Malcolm and Keith. You'll like them. They stayed out heah with their grandmothah one whole wintah, and they used to come up to ou' house lots. You remembah I told you 'bout them. They bought that pet beah from a tramp and neahly frightened me to death at their valentine pahty. I went into a dahk room, where it was tied up, and didn't know it was theah till it stood up on its hind feet and came at me. I neahly lost my mind, I was so sca'd."

"Oh, yes," cried Joyce. "I saw their pictures, all dressed up like little knights when they were in the tableaux." She surveyed them with great interest as the cloud of dust they were raising rapidly drew nearer.

"Which one was it ran away with you in a handcar, and nearly let the locomotive run over you?" asked Betty.

"That was Keith, the youngest one. He is on the black hawse."

"And which one gave you the silver arrow?" asked Eugenia.

"Malcolm," answered the Little Colonel, putting up her hand to feel the little pin that fastened her sailor collar.

"Oh, she's got it on now!" exclaimed Eugenia, turning to laugh over her shoulder at the other girls. "See how red her face is. I believe he is her sweetheart."

"It's no such a thing!" cried the Little Colonel, angrily. "Eugenia Forbes, you are the biggest goose I evah saw! Mothah says it's silly for children to talk about havin' sweethea'ts. We are just good friends."

"It isn't silly!" insisted Eugenia. "I have two sweethearts who send me flowers and candy, and write me notes, and they are just as jealous of each other as they can be."

"Then I'd be ashamed to brag of it," cried the Little Colonel, angry that her mother's opinion had been so flatly contradicted. But there was no time for a quarrel. The boys had come up with them, and Lloyd had to make the necessary introductions. Eugenia thought she had never seen two handsomer boys, or any one with more courtly manners, and as Malcolm rode along beside her, she wished that Mollie and Fay and Kell could see her knightly escort.

Joyce and Keith followed, and Betty and Rob

brought up the rear. The Little Colonel led the way. At the station she turned, saying, "Which way do you all want to go?"

"Have you ever been down by the gypsy camp?" asked Malcolm. "We boys passed that way a little while ago, and they were playing on banjos and dancing, and having a fine old time. It's quite a sight."

"Oh, yes, let's go!" cried Eugenia. "I'm wild to see it and have my fortune told. Joyce and I were talking about it a little while before we started. You want to go, don't you, Joyce?" she called back over her shoulder.

"What's that?" she answered. "To the gypsy camp? Of course. I thought that that was where we had decided to go when we started."

She had been in the house when Mrs. Sherman had discussed the matter with Eugenia and Betty, and was wholly unconscious that there was any objection to their going.

"I'm afraid mothah might not want us to go," said Lloyd. "Maybe it would be bettah to wait until anothah day and ask her."

Rob and Betty had fallen a little behind the others, having spied a bunch of four-leafed clovers, and Rob had dismounted to pick them, so they did not hear

the discussion that followed. Lloyd was not willing to go without her mother's permission, remembering what had been said about the camp the previous summer, but Eugenia had her way as she usually did. Her influence over Lloyd was growing stronger every day.

Busily talking with Rob, as they followed along, Betty did not notice where they were going, until the strumming of a banjo and loud singing drew her attention to the fact that they were almost upon the gypsy camp.

"Oh, we mustn't go in here!" she called, in alarm, seeing that the other girls were dismounting, and the boys were hitching their ponies along the fence.

"Why?" asked Joyce, pausing in the act of springing from the saddle.

"Godmother said we mustn't. Not an hour ago, she said it wasn't a proper place for us, and that she wouldn't think for a moment of allowing Lloyd to come. When she saw that we were disappointed, she planned an entertainment for us to-night, and we agreed to it, both of us, Eugenia and I. Eugenia knows she did."

There were some very curious glances exchanged in the little group, and the boys drew to one side, leaving the girls to settle the matter between them.

Eugenia darted a glance at Betty that would have withered her if it could.

"For goodness' sake don't make such an everlasting fuss about nothing," she exclaimed. "Come on; it will be all right."

"But Eugenia," interrupted Lloyd, "if mothah said I couldn't go that settles it."

"She didn't tell you, did she?" asked Eugenia.

"No, but if she told you, it is just the same."

"But she didn't tell me," persisted Eugenia, grown desperate to carry out her own wishes, and not stopping at the truth. "I'll tell you how it was."

Putting an arm around Lloyd, she drew her aside. "It is all Elizabeth's imagination," she protested, in a low tone. "I never saw such a little silly for making mountains out of mole-hills. She is such a 'fraid-cat that she wouldn't look behind her if a fly buzzed. Now you know, Lloyd, that, as particular as I am, I wouldn't think of going anywhere that wasn't proper, any more than your mother would. I'll take the responsibility. I'm sure I am old enough, and it's all right for us to go when three big boys are with us."

The others could not hear what passed between the two. Eugenia coaxed and wheedled and sneered by turns, and finally Lloyd yielded, and they all started in. All but Betty. She waited in the lane alone,

riding up and down, up and down, for ages it seemed to her, waiting for them to come back.

In reality it was not quite an hour that she kept her solitary vigil in the lane. As she rode back and forth she could catch glimpses of Eugenia's pink dress inside the tent, where they were all gathered around the old fortune-teller. Now and then she heard voices and laughter, and it gave her such a lonely, left-out feeling that she could scarcely keep back the tears. She knew that the others thought she was fussy and overparticular, and that helped to make her thoroughly uncomfortable.

The fretful wail of a sick baby sounded at intervals from the tent. The banjo-playing had stopped on their arrival. It was nearly noon when the six children came straggling out of the tent.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" said Eugenia, triumphantly. "Betty was a goose not to go, wasn't she? Why, Betty, she told me my whole past, and even described the three girls I go with at school. I am to have a long life and lots of money, and to be married twice. And she told me to beware of a fleshy, dark person with black eyes, who is jealous of me and will try to do me harm."

"What did she tell you, Joyce?" asked Betty, eagerly, feeling that she had missed the great oppor-

vanity or her life for lifting the veil that hid her future.

"She said that I had been across a big body of water and was going again, but the rest was a lot of stuff that I didn't believe and can't remember."

"She didn't give me a dollar's worth of fortune," complained Rob. "Not by a long shot." He had paid his own way and now thought regretfully of the two circuses to which the squandered dollar might have admitted him.

"Let's not tell anybody we've been here," suggested Eugenia as they started homeward. "It will make it so much more romantic, to keep it a secret. We can wait and see what comes true, and tell each other years afterward."

"But I always tell mothah everything," cried the Little Colonel, in surprise. "She would enjoy hearing the funny fortunes the old woman told us, and I'm suah if she knew how sick that poah baby is she'd send it something. She is always helpin' poah people."

"But I have a special reason for keeping it a secret," urged Eugenia. "Promise not to say anything about it for awhile anyhow. Wait till I am ready to go home."

"Why?" asked Lloyd, with a puzzled expression.

"She's afraid for godmother to know," said Betty,

unable to control her tongue any longer, and still smarting with the recollection of some of the things with which Eugenia had answered her refusal to go into the camp with them.

"It is no such a thing!" cried Eugenia. "It was all right for us to go, and I've a private reason of my own for not saying anything about it for awhile. It is a very little thing to ask, and I'm sure that, as a guest of Lloyd's, it is a very little thing for her to do, to respect my wishes that much."

"Oh, of course, if you put it that way," said Lloyd, "I'll not say anything about it till you tell me that I can."

"You boys don't mind promising, either, do you?" asked Eugenia, flashing a smile of her black eyes at each one in turn.

"Cross your hearts," she cried, laughing, as they gave their promise, "and swear 'Really truly, blackly, bluely, lay me down and cut me in twoly,' that you won't tell."

Joyce laughingly followed the boys' example, and Eugenia gave a significant smile toward Betty, riding on alone in dignified silence. "Then it is all right," she exclaimed, loud enough for her to hear, "that is, if Miss Goody-goody doesn't feel it her duty to run and tell"

Betty was too angry to make any answer. She rode on with her cheeks burning and her head held high. Mrs. Sherman was sitting in the wide, cool hall when the little party stopped at the steps. The boys had ridden down the avenue, too, and dismounted to speak to her.

"I have left invitations for you all to come to dinner to-night," she said, as Malcolm and Keith came up to shake hands. "Your Aunt Allison has consented to play fortune-teller for us. Have you ever had your fortune told, Rob? You are to come, too."

"Yes, once," answered Rob, cautiously, catching a warning look from Eugenia. "It wasn't very satisfactory, though, and I'll be glad to try it again."

Such a flush had spread over the Little Colonel's face that Mrs. Sherman noticed it. "I am afraid you have ridden too far in this noonday heat, little daughter," she said. "You'd better go up-stairs and bathe your face."

The boys took their leave, and Lloyd escaped from her mother's watchful eyes to follow her advice. When she came down to lunch, the flush was gone from her cheeks, but there was an uncomfortable pricking of her conscience that stayed with her all that afternoon, and deepened steadily after Miss Allison's arrival.

CHAPTER IX.

HER SACRED PROMISE.

THE fortune-telling began immediately after dinner. Miss Allison sat one side of a screen, and one by one the palms were thrust through a narrow opening for her to examine. Mrs. Sherman sat beside her, so neither of them saw the amused glances the children exchanged behind the screen, whenever her prophecies contradicted what the old gypsy had told them.

"I can judge of your chief characteristics by your hands," she said, "and it is wonderful how much palmistry reveals in that way; but I shall have to draw on my imagination for your future fortunes." This she did in such a bright amusing way that screams of laughter went up from behind the screen, and the hands she held often shook with merriment.

Not having had the experience of the gypsy tent, Betty awaited her turn with more interest than the others, and thrust her little brown hand through the

opening, half afraid. She wondered what secrets it would tell Miss Allison, who, in addition to all the pleasant, complimentary things she had told, had added some very plain truths. Eugenia's hand, she said, showed its owner to be extravagant and wilful; Malcolm's, vain and overbearing; Keith's, disorderly; and Rob's, lacking in judgment.

Miss Allison held Betty's hand a moment, not certain to whom it belonged, although she might have guessed, considering how brown and hardened by work it was. "Too sensitive and too imaginative by far," she said. "But I like this little hand. It will always be faithful in little things as well as big, and will keep its promises to the utmost. It is a hand that can be trusted."

Betty's face shone. What Miss Allison had said pleased her more than the fortune which followed, although it foretold a long life full of as many interesting happenings as if she had Aladdin's wonderful lamp to use as she chose. She looked at her hand with a new interest after she had withdrawn it from the screen, and Keith found her studying it again after the fortune-telling was done, and the others had gone into the drawing-room.

Eugenia sat at the piano, Lloyd twanged on the harp, while Joyce tuned her mandolin and Malcolm

his banjo. Rob lolled in an open window, listening, and beating time with both feet. Mrs. Sherman and Miss Allison were down at the far end of the wide porch, where the moonlight was stealing through the vines and shimmering on the floor.

It was on the porch steps that Keith found Betty looking at her hands again, as they lay spread out on her lap, and studying their lines by moonlight. He sat down beside her.

"How does your Aunt Allison know?" she asked, without looking up. "It seems like some sort of witches' work to me, the way she guessed things about the rest of you; and I suppose it's just as true what she said about me, — at least the part about being too sensitive and imaginative is true, I know. Cousin Hetty says I go about with my head in the clouds half the time. I would love to think that the other part is true, too. She said it in such a sweet solemn sort of a way, as if she laid some kind of a spell on my hand that was not to be broken. 'It will keep its promises to the utmost,' she said, and I feel that it will have to do it now, just because she said so."

"That is Aunt Allison's way," answered Keith. "Nobody knows how much she has helped Malcolm and me by giving us these, and expecting us to live

up to them." He touched a little badge on the lapel of his coat, as he spoke. It was a tiny flower of white enamel, with a little diamond in the centre, like a drop of dew.

"What is that for?" asked Betty, curiously. "I have been wondering why you and your brother both wear them."

"Aunt Allison gave them to us. She calls us her two little knights, and this is the badge of our knighthood, 'wearing the white flower of a blameless life.' It began one time when we were out at grandmother's all winter. We gave a benefit for a little tramp, who came very near being burned to death in a cabin on the place. We had tableaux, you know, and Malcolm and I were knights in one of them."

"Oh, I know," interrupted Betty, eagerly. "I've seen your picture taken in that costume, and it is lovely."

"And then Aunt Allison explained all about King Arthur and his Round Table, and gave us the motto: 'Live pure, speak truth, right the wrong, honour the king, else wherefore born?'"

Betty repeated it softly. "How lovely!" she exclaimed, in a low tone. All the instruments were going now in the drawing-room, — harp, mandolin,

piano, and banjo, and the music floated out sweetly on the night air to the earnest little couple on the steps. And the music, and the moonlight, and Betty's sympathetic little face, made it easy for Keith to grow confidential just then, and speak of things that usually make boys shy. He told her of his ambition to live up to his knightly motto, and of some of his boyish efforts to right the wrong in the big world about him, and all that he hoped to do when he was grown, and was free to use the money his grandfather had left him.

"I wish I could be a knight," sighed Betty to herself, moved to large ambitions by the boy's words, and discontented with her own small sphere. How manly he looked in the moonlight, his handsome face aglow with the thought of his noble purposes!

"It's funny," said Keith, looking down at her, "you're the only person that I ever talked to about such things, but Aunt Allison. You seem to understand in the same way that she does. I believe you'd have made a good knight yourself if you had lived in those days, because that is one of the things they had to vow, to keep a promise to the utmost."

Betty smiled happily, but made no answer. Rob joined them just then, and they fell to talking of

childish things again, — games and pets, and things they had done, and places they had been. Next morning in her "Good times" book, Betty carefully wrote every word she could remember that Keith had said the evening before, about knights and knightly deeds. It was a half-hour that she loved to think about.

Miss Allison had invited them all to a picnic at the old mill on the following day. They were to go in the afternoon and come back by moonlight. It was not quite four o'clock when Mrs. Sherman stepped into the carriage at the door, followed by Eliot with an armful of wraps, which might be needed later in the evening. Every spare inch of the carriage was packed with things for the picnic. A huge lunch hamper stood on the front seat beside the coachman, and he could scarcely find room for his feet for the big freezer of ice-cream that took up so much space. Rugs, cushions, and camp-stools were tucked in at every corner, and Mrs. Sherman held Joyce's mandolin in her lap.

"Oh, girls!" she called, leaning out of the carriage and looking up at the second story windows. "Can I trust one of you to post the letter that I have left on the hall table?"

Two bright faces appeared at the same instant at

different windows, and two voices called in the same breath, one answering, "Yes, godmother," and the other, "Yes, Cousin Elizabeth."

"I would take it myself," said Mrs. Sherman, "if I were going past the post-office, but I have to drive a roundabout way to the Ross place, to get some berries I engaged for the picnic. It is very important that the letter should go on to-night's mail train, and if one of you will drop it in the box as you go by, I'll be so much obliged."

"Yes'm, I'll do it," answered each girl again, almost in the same breath. With a nod and a smile to them, Mrs. Sherman told Alec to drive on. The ponies, already saddled and bridled, were waiting in front of the house. The girls were to ride by the MacIntyre place and escort Miss Allison's carriage to the picnic-ground, and had promised to be there at four, but the hall clock struck the hour before the last dress was buttoned and the last ribbon tied.

"Do you heah that?" cried the Little Colonel, in a panic of haste, as the musical chime sounded through the house. "It will nevah do to keep Miss Allison waitin'! Come on!" she exclaimed, adding, as she flew through the upper hall, "The last one down the stairs is a pop-eyed monkey!"

"I'm not it!" shrieked Joyce, racing past her.

"I'm not it!" echoed Betty, darting ahead of them both, and reaching the ponies first.

"Eugenia's last! She is the pop-eyed monkey!" cried Joyce, cheerfully, looking back with a laugh as she began to untie Calico. Eugenia switched her skirts disdainfully through the hall, and mounted in dignified disgust.

"You're elegant, I must say!" she exclaimed, scornfully. "I wouldn't play such a kid game!" Nevertheless, she dashed down the avenue at the top of her speed, when Joyce called out, tantalisingly, "The last one through the gate is a jibbering ornithorhynchus!" In her zeal not to be dubbed such a title for the rest of the day as a jibbering ornithorhynchus, Betty urged Lad along until she nearly bounced out of her saddle, and the letter lay on the hall table, forgotten by both the girls who had promised to post it.

It was a devious way to the ruins of the old stone mill, — down unfrequented roads, through meadow gates, and over a narrow pasture lot, then up a little hill and into a cool beech woods, where the peace of the summer reigned unbroken. Piloted by Lloyd, they reached the place just as Mrs. Sherman drove in from the opposite side of the woods.

The vacant windows of the old mill seemed staring

in surprise at the gay party gathering on the hill above it, although it should have been accustomed to all kinds of picnics by this time, considering the number of generations it had watched them come and go. Nobody could tell how long it had been since the mill wheel turned its last round and the miller ground his last grist, but if the stones could babble secrets like the little spring, trickling down the rocky bank, they would have had many an interesting tale to tell of all that had happened in their hearing.

There were many names and initials carved in the bark of the old beech-trees. Malcolm found his father's and mother's on one, as he wandered around with Eugenia, and set to work to cut his own underneath. Eugenia seated herself on a rock near by, to watch him. Keith and Rob, and the other boys who had been invited to the picnic, busied themselves by dragging up sticks and logs for a big bonfire. The girls began a game of "I spy" behind the great rock where the columbines clambered in the spring, and spread their blossoms like butterflies poised on an airy stem.

"Come on, Eugenia," they called, but she shrugged her shoulders with what the girls called a "young ladified air," and turned to Malcolm with a coquettish glance of her big black eyes.

"I know whose initials you are going to cut with yours," she said.

"Whose?" asked Malcolm, digging away at a capital M.

"Oh, I'll not tell, but I know well enough. There's only one that you *could* cut, you know."

"You needn't be so sure about that," said Malcolm, loftily. "I know plenty of names that I wouldn't mind cutting here in this tree with mine."

"With a heart around them, like the ones on this tree?" she asked, pointing to a rude carving on the trunk against which she leaned.

"Yes, with a heart around them," he repeated.

"But there's only one name you would carve that way, and put an *arrow* through it," she said, meaningly. "At any rate, a silver arrow. Oh, maybe you think I haven't seen her wear it, and blush when I teased her about it."

Malcolm went on cutting, without an answer. He had admired Eugenia more than any girl he had ever seen, but somehow this speech jarred on him. It did not seem exactly ladylike for her to insist on twitting him in such a personal way about his friendship for the Little Colonel. *She* would never have done such a thing, he felt quite sure. For a moment he half wished that it was Lloyd sitting on the rock beside

him, but Eugenia could be very entertaining when she chose, and she was trying her best now to make an agreeable impression on this handsome boy who seemed so fond of Lloyd. She wanted to be first in his attentions, and, as usual, she had her way.

"I told you so!" she cried, presently, as a large capital L appeared under Malcolm's initials. "I knew you just couldn't help making an L, and the next one will be an S."

"I'm not done yet," he said, with a smiling side-glance at her, and added two more lines, changing the L to an E. An expression of pleasure flashed across her face, as he outlined an F next to it. It would be something to tell Mollie and Fay and Kell next time she wrote, that the handsomest boy in Kentucky (as she enthusiastically described him to them), with the manners of a Sir Philip Sidney, had left the record of his attachment for her where all might read.

She gave him another smile from under her long black eyelashes, and then looked down with a blush. He added the heart to the inscription then, and pierced it with an arrow.

While these two played at a game that older children had played before them for many a generation (as the scarred old tree-trunks bore silent witness

on every hand), the game of "I spy" went on uproariously behind the columbine rock. The bonfire blazed higher and higher. It lighted the cool depths of the darkening woods, and sent dancing shadows across the deep ravines, and presently the picnic feast was spread near by and part of the supper was cooked over its coals.

It was by its weird light that the charades were played, when the feast had been cleared away. Miss Allison arranged them. The actors were all little negroes, the funniest, blackest little pickaninnies that ever sung a song or danced a double shuffle.

"It's Sylvia Gibbs's family," explained Miss Allison, to the girls. "Our circle of King's Daughters had them under its wing all winter, or they would have starved. When I discovered what heathen they were, I turned missionary and taught them an hour every Sunday afternoon. They will do anything for me now, and are such clever little mimics that I know they can act the charades charmingly. Besides, they will give us a cake-walk afterward, and sing for us like nightingales."

While Miss Allison marshalled her flock of little darkies behind the great rock, Mrs. Sherman called the children to seat themselves in a semicircle on the camp-stools and rugs in front. "This is to be a

guessing contest," she explained, as she passed a card and pencil to each guest. "There must be no talking, and no comparing notes. As each syllable is acted, write down the word you think is meant. The one who guesses the most charades wins the prize. Stir the bonfire, Alec. Now, all ready!"

Miss Allison came out in front of her audience. "This word is the name of a favourite book," she announced. "It consists of two words. The first word is in three syllables, the second in two. They will be given in five separate acts."

Every eye watched intently, as three little coloured boys came out from behind the rock and went through the scene of a highway robbery. Little Jim Gibbs, his white teeth and gleaming eyeballs making his face seem as black as night by contrast, strode out with a high silk hat, a baggy umbrella, and an old carpet-bag. He was evidently intended to represent a lonely traveller, for, as he sauntered along in front of the audience, two other boys of the Gibbs family sprang out of the bushes in the background, with white cloth masks over their faces. One carried a dark lantern and the other a toy pistol, which he held at Jim's head. They proceeded to go through the traveller's pockets, stealing watch, purse, carpet-

bag, and umbrella. After that they took to their heels, leaving the poor despoiled traveller looking mournfully at his empty pockets, which were turned wrong side out.

"Steal" wrote Eugenia on her card, although she could think of no book beginning with that name. "Thieves" wrote Rob, and any one looking over the shoulders of the group would have seen several cards which bore the same word, but more which their puzzled owners had left blank. Betty tapped her teeth a moment with a pencil and then triumphantly wrote "rob."

The next act showed a hastily constructed house made of a clothes-horse and heavy roofing paper. Doors and windows had been roughly outlined in charcoal. In front, a swinging sign-board announced it as the "Traveller's Rest" and offered refreshment within for man and beast.

"Inn" wrote Betty, quickly guessing the second syllable. She was sure of the whole word, now, but the majority of the children sat with their pencils in their mouths, unable to think of any word that would fit in place beside the one already written.

"Oh, this is easy," said Betty to herself, writing the name "Robinson Crusoe" after the last act, as the *crew* of little pickaninnies, seated in an old skiff which

had been dragged up from the mill stream for that purpose, took up a piece of patch-work and began to *sew*. Betty was the only one who had guessed it.

The next charade was easier. Every one wrote "music" on his card, after the two acts in which plaintive *mews* floated up from the rocks and the Gibbs family were taken *sick*. All but Jim, who, in the high silk hat he had worn before, took the part of doctor.

"If they are all as easy as this," thought Betty, "I can surely take one of the prizes," and she waited eagerly for the next word. In the first act 'Tildy Gibbs came out with an envelope in her hands, and all of a sudden Betty's heart gave a guilty thump as she thought of the letter she and Eugenia had left lying on the hall table. They had forgotten their promise.

"But it is Eugenia's fault every bit as much as it is mine," she thought, looking across the semicircle, where Eugenia sat serenely unconscious of forgotten promises. "She's just as much to blame as I am. Oh, well, I'll mail it first thing in the morning."

But her conscience kept troubling her. "Your godmother asked if she could trust you, and she said it was important. You know you promised. There's time yet to slip away and post that letter before the mail train goes by."

But Betty would not listen to her conscience. She resolutely turned her attention to the charades, until all at once she seemed to hear Miss Allison's voice saying, "I like this little hand. It will keep a promise to the utmost." Then Keith's conversation of the night before came back to her about his motto and his badge. But more than all, the thought of being worthy of her godmother's trust in her impelled her to keep her promise.

It was a hard struggle that went on in the little girl's mind just then. From the puzzled glances around her she was sure that she was the only one who had guessed all the charades correctly; therefore she stood the best chance of winning the first prize, and she wanted it — oh, how she wanted it! — for Mrs. Sherman had said that it was a book. And yet — her sacred promise! If she kept it, she would lose her only chance. It was twilight in the woods, and it would be dark before she could get back to the picnic-grounds. It wouldn't be right to ask any one else to go with her, and miss the chance of winning the prize, too. Still, there was that promise, and it must be kept — to the utmost. All these thoughts went on, swaying her first to one decision and then another.

She half rose from the rug where she was sitting,

then dropped down again. It seemed hardly fair that Eugenia should not share the responsibility, yet she knew her too well to ask her to go back to the house with her. Several times she started up and then sank back before she could make up her mind. Finally she walked over to a fence corner on the other side of the bonfire, where the water-bucket stood. The ponies were hitched below in the ravine. So intently was the group above watching the charades, that no one saw her when she scrambled down the steep path leading into the ravine, and began untying Lad. Climbing into the saddle, she gave one regretful look at the party she was leaving behind her, and resolutely turned his head toward home.

It was lighter out in the open, when they had left the shelter of the woods, and she guided the pony down the hill, across the pasture, and through the gate, glad that she did not have to go all the way in darkness. Lad, knowing that he was going home, dashed down the road, choosing his own direction when the lonely highway branched. He knew the way better than his little rider.

She looked around her, thinking how long the way seemed when she had to travel it all by herself. She was riding faster than she had ever ridden before, and yet it seemed hours since she had left the mill when

she at last reached the great gate with the avenue of locusts stretching beyond it.

Springing off the pony when it stopped at the steps, she rushed into the hall, snatched the letter from the table, and ran out again, only pausing for a hasty glance at the clock. Mom Beck, who had heard the clatter of hoofs, the quick step on the porch, and the wild dash out again, feared that something was amiss, and came running to the door.

"What undah the sun is the mattah, honey?" she called, but Betty was far down the avenue, and never paused to look back.

Lad, turned away from home, was not so willing to run now, and Betty could hear the train whistling up the road. It was the seven o'clock mail train.

"Oh, Lad, hurry!" she urged. "Dear, good old Lad, *please* hurry! I'm so afraid we won't get there in time."

Lad looked around at her and stopped still in the road. The train whistled nearer. Guiding the pony to the fence, Betty stood up and broke a switch from an overhanging tree.

"I hate to do it, you poor old fellow," she said, "but I must. You *must* get to the post-office in time." Urged along by the switch and her tearful pleadings, Lad broke into a run and brought up at

the post-office, just as the postmistress was locking the mail-bag. "Oh, Miss Mattie!" sounded an anxious little voice at the delivery window, "is it too late to send this letter? Mrs. Sherman said it must go, if possible, on this train."

"It's a close shave, my dear," said Miss Mattie, reaching out to take the letter eagerly thrust through the bars. "I'm a few minutes late, anyhow, and there's barely time to stamp it and slip it in, so!" She acted while she spoke, so that with the last word she had turned the key. A coloured porter, who stood waiting, caught up the bag and hurried across the road to the railroad station. The train came thundering down the track, and he jumped across in front of the locomotive.

Betty watched until she saw the mail-bag tossed aboard, and then gave a deep sigh of thankfulness. "Well," she exclaimed to Lad, in a relieved tone, "that's done! We're too late for the charades, but maybe we'll get back to the mill in time for the cake-walk."

It would have been quite dark by the time she reached the cross-roads again, if it had not been that the moon was beginning to rise, and cast a faint whiteness over the dusky fields. She could not remember which way to turn. The first time she

passed that way she had paid no attention to direction, but had followed heedlessly after Lloyd. The second time the pony had shot by so fast that she had had no time to consider. Now he stood still, not caring which way she chose so long as he had to travel away from his stall and feed-bin.

"It must be to the left," she said, in bewilderment, after a moment's hesitation, and slowly turned in that direction. But she had taken the wrong way. She went on and on, wondering why she did not come to a gate, when the road suddenly turned into a narrow wagon track, with dark corn-fields on each side. There was not a house or a human being in sight.

The moon was not high enough yet to dispel much of the gloom of the twilight, and bullbats were circling overhead, dipping so low at times that once they almost brushed her face.

"Oh, I'm lost!" she whispered, with trembling lips. All of a sudden there was a rustling of the high corn, and out of it limped a big burly negro. He had a gun on his shoulder, and a savage-eyed dog skulked at his heels. Betty nearly screamed in her terror at this sudden appearance. She knew at a glance that the fellow must be "Limping Tige," one of the worst characters in the county. He had just served a third term in the penitentiary, and she

had heard Mom Beck say that nobody in the Valley would draw an easy breath while Limping Tige was loose.

A cold fear seized the child, and such a weakness numbed her trembling hands that she could scarcely hold the bridle.

Wheeling the pony so suddenly that she almost lost her balance, she gave him a cut with the switch that sent him flying back over the road he had come, at the top of his speed. Now every bush and every tree and every brier-tangled fence corner seemed to hold some nameless terror for her, and even her lips were cold and blue with fear.

At the cross-roads she had another fright, as something big and black loomed up in the moonlight ahead of her. "Oh, what is it?" she moaned, so frightened that her heart almost stopped beating. The next glance showed her that it was some one coming toward her on horseback, and then a cheery whistling reassured her. Nobody could be very dangerous, she knew, who could go along the road whistling "My Old Kentucky Home" in such a happy fashion.

It was Keith, who had come to hunt for her. They had missed her, when the charades were over, and, finding her pony gone too, thought that she

must have been taken suddenly ill, and had slipped away quietly in order not to disturb the pleasure of the others.

Keith had offered to ride up to Locust and see what was the matter, and his surprise showed itself in his rapid questioning when he met her riding wildly away from the place where she had seen Limping Tige. It did not take long for him to learn the whole story of her lonely ride, and the fright she had had, for his questions were fired with such directness of aim that truthful Betty could not dodge them. "And you missed it all — the charades and the chance of taking the prize — and came all the way back by yourself just to post a letter, when you didn't know the way!" he exclaimed again as they drew in sight of the old mill.

"Well, I call that pretty plucky for a girl."

"I didn't want to," confessed Betty, "but there wasn't anything else to do. It was a sacred promise, you know, and I had to keep it — to the utmost."

They jogged along in silence side by side, a moment longer. Then as the bonfire at the old mill flared into sight, Keith looked down at the tired little figure on the pony beside him.

"Betty," he said, with a gleam of admiration in his eyes, "you're a *brick!*"

CHAPTER X.

"FOUND OUT."

"WHAT makes everybody so snarly this morning?" asked Joyce, looking around on the circle of moody faces. The four girls had been lounging in hammocks and chairs under the trees for several hours, and in all that time scarcely a civil word had been spoken.

"There isn't any reason why we should be cross," Joyce went on. "It's a glorious day, we've had a delicious breakfast and a good ride, and there is the tissue-paper party at Sally Fairfax's to-night to look forward to. But in spite of it all I feel so mean and cross that I want to scratch somebody."

Betty looked up from her book and laughed. "I don't feel snarly, but I've been wondering ever since breakfast what had happened to make you all out of sorts. Lloyd looks as if she had been eating sour pickles, and Eugenia has snapped at everybody who has spoken to her this morning."

"That's a story!" exclaimed Eugenia, tartly, with

such a frown that Lloyd began singing in a tantalising tone, "Crosspatch, draw the latch, sit by the fire and spin."

"Oh, hush up!" exclaimed Eugenia, crossly.

"Why, Lloyd," said Mrs. Sherman, coming up just then in time to hear Lloyd's song and Eugenia's answer, "you are surely not teasing one of your guests! I am surprised!"

To every one's astonishment, Lloyd flopped over in the hammock, and, covering her face with her arm, began to cry.

"What is the matter, little daughter?" asked Mrs. Sherman, in alarm, sitting down in the hammock beside her and stroking the short soft hair soothingly. She had never known Lloyd to be so sensitive to a slight reproof.

"Mother didn't mean to scold her little girl. I was only surprised to hear you saying anything unpleasant to a guest of yours."

"You-you'd have said it, too!" sobbed the Little Colonel, "if Eu-Eugenia had been so mean to you all mawnin'! She's been t-talkin so hateful and cross —"

"I have *not!*" cried Eugenia. "You began it, and you have tried to pick a quarrel ever since we came out here, and Joyce has kept nagging at me,

too. You've both made me feel so miserable and unhappy that I wish I'd never set eyes on you and your horrid old Kentucky!"

Here, to Mrs. Sherman's still greater surprise, Eugenia fumbled for her handkerchief and began mopping up the tears that were streaming down her face.

"Really, girls, I am distressed!" exclaimed Mrs. Sherman. "Is there anything serious the matter that you have been quarrelling about, or are you only ill and nervous?"

"I nevah was so mizzible in all my life," said Lloyd. "My throat is soah and my eyes ache, and I can't help cryin' if anybody looks at me."

"That's just the way I feel," said Eugenia, still dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, "and my head aches, besides."

"I think we are all three taking bad colds," said Joyce, from her hammock. "I haven't reached the crying stage yet, but I'm fast on the way toward it. Betty will be the only one able to go to the party to-night, and our tissue-paper dresses are *so* pretty."

Mrs. Sherman looked from one flushed face to another with a puzzled expression. "I don't know what to think," she said, "but if I were not sure that you have been no place where you possibly could

have been exposed, I should be afraid that you are all taking the measles. Doctor Fuller told me the other day that there are several children in the gypsy camp down with it, and one poor little baby had died. It didn't have proper attention. Why, what is the matter, girls?" Mrs. Sherman paused, having seen a startled glance pass from Lloyd to Eugenia.

"Surely you haven't been near any of those people, have you? Passed them on the road, or met them at the station at any time?"

There was a long pause in which nobody answered, and in which Betty could hear her heart beat fast.

"Lloyd, answer me," insisted Mrs. Sherman.

"Eu-Eugenia won't l-let me!" sobbed the Little Colonel. "She made us all p-promise not to tell."

Eugenia's face turned pale, but she lifted her head defiantly as Mrs. Sherman turned to her, calling her name.

"What is the trouble, child? You surely didn't go to the camp that morning when I warned you not to?"

"Yes, we did," answered Eugenia, a little frightened now by the expression of Mrs. Sherman's face, but still defiant.

"When was it?"

"About a week ago, I think. I don't remember exactly."

"It's been nine days," said Betty, counting her fingers. "I remember it because it was the day before the picnic at the old mill."

"And there was a sick baby in the tent when we went in to have our fortunes told," added Joyce. "It lay in the old woman's lap all the time she held my hand, and it kept turning its head from side to side, and fretting in a weak little voice as if it didn't have strength to cry hard. That must have been the poor little thing that died."

"And you all went into that tent and all let that old woman hold your hands?" asked Mrs. Sherman, looking around from one to another with a distressed face.

"No, mothah," cried the Little Colonel, "Betty didn't go, and she tried to keep us from goin'. She said you wouldn't like it."

A loving smile of unspoken approval, that made Betty's heart glow with pleasure, lighted Mrs. Sherman's face for an instant. Then she turned to the others.

"Well, I'll send for Doctor Fuller immediately. If it proves to be the measles, we will turn the house into a hospital at once. If the old saying is true

that misery loves company, then you ought to be a contented quartette."

"Oh, I've already had the measles," said Betty, quickly, "two years ago."

"Then I'm glad that you will not have to suffer for the disobedience of the others," answered her godmother. "It has brought its own punishment this time, so I'll not add a scolding. I'll leave the measles, if that's what it turns out to be, to preach you a sermon on the text, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.'"

Sally Fairfax welcomed no guests from Locust that night at her party, for the doctor made his visit and pronounced his verdict. No parties for many a long day. Lloyd and Eugenia and Joyce had the measles, and nobody would want Betty to come for fear of the contagion.

Mrs. Sherman and Eliot and Mom Beck went from one darkened room to another with hot lemonade, and Betty was left to roam about the place by herself. Once she slipped into the sewing-room where the tissue-paper costumes were laid out in readiness beside the dainty little flower-shaped hats. Joyce's was patterned after a pale blue morning-glory, and Eugenia's a scarlet poppy. Lloyd's looked like a pink hyacinth, and Betty's a daffodil.

"It's too bad," mourned Betty, tilting the graceful daffodil blossom of a hat on her brown curls, and admiring it in the mirror. "*I* haven't got the measles, and this is so sweet, it's a pity not to wear it somewhere."

Late that evening she heard the Little Colonel grumbling: "Well, this is a house pahty suah enough, I must say! Heah we are in the house, and heah we'll stay and miss all the fun. I don't like this kind of a house pahty!"

"Nevah mine, honey," said Mom Beck. "It'll not be as bad as you think. The measles is done broke out on you beautiful — as thick as hops."

"But I hate this dahk room," wailed the Little Colonel, "and it's so poky and tiahsome, and I am so hot and I ache all ovah — "

Then Betty heard Mrs. Sherman go into the room, and the fretting ceased as her cool hand stroked the hot little forehead, and her voice began a slumber song. It was the "White Seal's Lullaby."

"'Oh, hush thee my baby, the night is behind us,
And black are the waters that sparkled so green.'"

How often she had read it in her "Jungle Book," but she had no idea how beautiful it was until she heard it as her godmother was singing it. There was

the slow, restful, swinging motion of the waves in that music; the coolness of the deep green seas. How quickly it took away the fever and the aching, and left the healing of sleep in its wake!

"'Where billow meets billow, there soft be thy pillow.
Oh, weary wee flipperling, curl at thy ease!
The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee,
Asleep in the arms of the slow swinging seas.'"

Betty, in her room across the hall, leaned her head against the window-sill and looked out into the darkness. There were tears in her eyes. "Oh," she whispered, with a quivering lip, "if I only had a mother to sing to me like that, I wouldn't mind having the measles or anything else!"

The worst was over in a few days, and then two cots were carried into Eugenia's room for Lloyd and Joyce to occupy during the day. The windows still had to be kept darkened, but the girls managed to find a great deal to amuse themselves with. They would not have fared so well had it not been for Betty. Many an hour she spent in the dim room, when the summer was calling to her on every breeze to come out in its sunshine and be glad in its cheer. Many a game of checkers she played with the exacting invalids, when she longed to be riding over the

country on Lad. And she read aloud by the single ray of light admitted through the shutters, and told stories until her voice was husky.

"It's fun, isn't it?" said Eugenia, one day when they were waiting for their lunch to be brought up. "I am always wondering what is coming next, for Cousin Elizabeth has never missed a day, sending up some surprise with our meals. It is a continual surprise-party."

"We'll be dreadfully spoiled," said Joyce, "like a little boy at home that I know. He insists on keeping Christmas the year around. As he is the only child, and they'd give him the moon if they could reach it, they let him hang up his stocking every night, and every morning there is a present in it for him."

"Cousin Elizabeth is spoiling us just the same way," said Eugenia. "Those little souvenir spoons she sent up with the chocolate yesterday are perfect darlings. I think the world of mine."

"I wonder what the surprise will be to-day," said Lloyd, as the jingling of silver and tinkling of ice in glasses sounded on the stairs.

"I know," said Betty, running to open the door for the procession of tray bearers. "It is conundrum salad. I helped godmother make it."

Eliot, Mom Beck, and the housemaid entered in solemn file, each bearing a tray containing a simple lunch, in the centre of which was a fancy plate containing a pile of crisp green lettuce.

"Isn't that a dainty dish to set before the king!" exclaimed Joyce, examining her conundrum salad. "Oh, girls, how that did fool me. I could have sworn that those were real lettuce leaves, and they are only paper. But what a clever imitation, and what a lot of conundrums written inside!"

"See if you can guess this one?" cried Eugenia. "Isn't it funny?" and she read a clever one that set them all to thinking. There was much laughter when they finally had to give it up, and she told them the answer.

"Now listen to this," said Lloyd next, and then it was Joyce's turn, and the lunch was eaten in the midst of much laughing and many bright remarks that the salad called forth.

"You wouldn't think that having measles was so funny," said Betty, when the trays had been carried out, "if you had had it the way I did. It was in the middle of harvest, so nobody had time to take care of me. Cousin Hetty had so much to do that she couldn't come up-stairs many times a day to wait on me. She'd just look in the door and

ask if I wanted anything, and hurry away again. My little room in the west gable was *so* hot. The sun beat against it all afternoon, and the water in the pitcher wouldn't stay cool. Sometimes I'd cry till my throat ached, wishing that I had a mother to sit beside me, and put her cool hands against my face, and rub my back when it ached, and sing me to sleep. And after I got better, and my appetite began to come back, I'd lie and watch the door for hours, it seemed to me, waiting for Cousin Hetty to come up with my meals. I'd think of all sorts of dainty things that I had read about, until my mouth watered. Then when she came, maybe there would be nothing but a cup of tea slopped all over the saucer, and a piece of burnt toast. Or maybe it would be a bowl of soup half cold, or too salty. Poor Cousin Hetty was so busy she couldn't bother to fix things for me. I couldn't help crying when she'd gone down-stairs. I'd be so disappointed.

"But the worst thing of all was what Davy did one day. He wanted to be kind and nice, and do something for me, so he went off to the pond, and sat there on the hot sunny bank all morning, trying to catch me a fish. To everybody's surprise he did catch one about eleven o'clock, — a slimy-looking little catfish, — and came running straight up to

my room with it in his dirty little hands. He smelled so fishy I could scarcely stand it, for it was the day I felt the very worst. But he didn't know that. He climbed up on the bed with it, and held it almost under my nose for me to see. He was so happy that his dirty little face was all one big smile. He kept saying, as he dangled it around, 'Ain't he pretty, Betty? I ketched him. I ketched him for you, 'cause you're sick.'

"Ugh! I can smell that fish yet! I smelled it all afternoon, for he took it down-stairs to have it cleaned and cooked. About one o'clock he came back up-stairs after I had had my lunch, and there he had it on a plate, fried up into a crisp. I couldn't have swallowed any of it, to save me, but I couldn't disappoint the little fellow when he had tried so hard to please me, so I had to ask him to leave it, and told him maybe I would feel more like eating after I had slept awhile. So he went out perfectly satisfied, and I lay there, growing sicker every minute from the smell of that fried fish. At last I gathered up strength enough to throw it out of the window to the cat, but the plate still smelled of it, and nobody came in to take it away until after dark.

"Cousin Hetty was dreadfully worried when she

found that Davy had been in my room, but he didn't take the measles, and that was the only time I saw him while I was sick. I was alone all the time. You can't imagine how doleful it was to stay in that hot dark room all day by myself."

"You poor little Bettykins!" sighed Joyce, sympathetically. "It's too bad you can't have the measles all over again with us, here at the house party. It really isn't a bit bad now. I am enjoying it immensely."

As she spoke there was the sound of a horse's hoofs in the avenue, and a moment later a shrill whistle sounded under the window.

"Hello, Measles," shouted a merry voice.

"It's Rob!" exclaimed Lloyd. "Hello yourself!" she called back, laughingly. "Come in and have some, won't you?"

"No, thank you," he answered. "You are too generous. But I say, Lloyd, let down a basket or something, won't you? I've got a surprise here for you all."

"Take the scrap-basket, Betty," said Lloyd, excitedly pointing to a fancy little basket made of braided sweet grass, and tied with many bows. "My skipping-rope is in the closet. You can let it down by that if you tie it to the handles."

A moment later Betty's smiling face appeared at the window, and the basket was lowered to the boy on the horse below.

"I can't reach it without standing up on the saddle," called Rob. "Whoa, there, Ben! Easy, old boy!" With feet wide apart to balance himself, Rob carefully dropped something from the basket he carried on his arm to the one that Betty dangled on a level with his eyes.

"One for you, too, Betty," the girls heard him say, but he had cantered off down the avenue before they discovered what it was he had left for them.

Betty carefully drew the basket in, fearful lest the rope might slip, for "the surprise" was heavy. As she landed it safely and turned the basket over on the floor, out rolled four fat little fox-terrier puppies.

"What darlings!" cried Lloyd, springing off her cot to catch up one of the plump little things as it sprawled toward her on its awkward paws. "They are so much alike we'll never be able to tell them apart unless we tie different coloured ribbons on them. I'm going to name mine Bob after Robby, 'cause he gave them to us."

"Let's name them all that," said Betty. "We'll be taking them away to different places soon, so it

will not make any difference." The suggestion was received with applause, and Eugenia sent Eliot to her trunk for a piece of pale green ribbon. "I'm going to have my Bob's necktie match my room," she said.

"We'll all do that, too," said Joyce, and in a few minutes the four Bobs were frisking clumsily over the floor, in their respective bows of pink, yellow, blue, and green. They afforded the girls entertainment all that afternoon, and in the evening there was another surprise.

In the starlight, when it was dark enough for the blinds and shutters to be all thrown open in their rooms, they heard a carriage coming down the avenue. It, too, stopped under the window, and in a moment they recognised the twang of Malcolm's banjo and Miss Allison's guitar. "It's a serenade," called Eugenia. "What a good alto voice Keith has!"

It was an old college tune that rose on the air. Miss Allison had parodied the words of the peanut song:

Any fellow that has any *mea*-sles
And giveth his neighbour none,
He sha'n't have any of *my* measles
When his mea-*sles* are gone.
Oh, that will be joyful, joyful,
Oh, that will be joyful, when his mea-sles
are gone.

Then they sang, "My love is like the red, red rose" and "Pop goes the weasel, the queen's got the measles." They were all silly little ditties, but the personal allusions made them interesting to the girls, and there was a storm of applause from the upper windows after each one. Mrs. Sherman brought out cake and lemonade to the serenaders, and the girls hung out of the windows as far as they dared, to see what was going on below.

"If we only hadn't gone to that horrid old gypsy camp," lamented the Little Colonel, "we might be down there now, having a share of the good time. What *are* you all laughing at?" she called. "It is simply maddening to be up here and listen to you and not know."

Malcolm leaned out of the carriage to sing, teasingly, "Thou art so near and yet so far," adding, "Never mind, Lloyd, we'll come again to-morrow, and bring a travelling show with us. Look out for us early in the morning, before it begins to get hot."

"What do you suppose those boys are going to do?" asked Eugenia, as Lloyd drew in her head, and the carriage rolled off, the serenaders still singing.

"I haven't the faintest idea. There's nothing to do but wait and see."

Although the question was asked several times that evening before bedtime, and the girls amused themselves for a quarter of an hour guessing what kind of a travelling show was to be brought by for their entertainment, not one of them thought of it again next morning. The doctor had decided that their eyes were well enough to bear the light, and, at his visit, threw open several of the blinds. Mrs. Sherman drove down to the station, and Mom Beck went to the servants' cottage. Only Eliot was left to keep an eye on the invalids, and she had been invited to bring her sewing and listen to a story that Betty was reading aloud. They had grown very fond of patient old Eliot, for she had been the kindest and best of nurses in their illness. The girls were all lounging around the room in wrappers, each with her own particular Bob in her lap.

The reading had gone on for about half an hour, when Eliot's sewing suddenly slid from her lap to the floor, and a queer rattle in her throat made every one look up in alarm. At first they thought that she must be having some kind of a fit. Her hands were thrown up, her mouth dropped open, there was a look of wild terror in her staring eyes, and her face was deathly pale. It was terrifying to see a grown woman seem so frightened. She was pointing to the door, and,

"THERE WAS ONE WILD SCREAM AFTER ANOTHER."

as their eyes followed her shaking finger, they forgot her fear in their own fright.

There, standing on its hind legs in the door, was an enormous bear, taller than any man they had ever seen. Its mouth was open, and a long red tongue hung out between its gleaming teeth. Trailing behind him was a heavy rope, that showed that he had broken away from some place of confinement.

There was one wild scream after another, as the girls sprang up, spilling the four Bobs out of their laps to the floor. Eugenia rolled under the bed in such mad haste that she bumped her head against the footboard, crying in an imploring tone as she disappeared, "Oh, don't eat me! Don't eat me!" Joyce scrambled up on a high chest of drawers, and from there to the top of the wardrobe, where she sat panting and looking down at the bear, who seemed surprised at his reception. After one frightened scream, Betty buried her head in a sofa pillow like a little ostrich, and made no attempt to escape. She seemed glued to her chair.

The Little Colonel, who had stumbled over all of the four Bobbies in her confusion, and fallen on top of them as she tried to scramble up from her knees, gave one more startled look at the intruder, and then sprang up with an angry cry. "It's that old tramp

beah that belongs to Malcolm and Keith," she exclaimed, in a great passion. The girls had never seen her in such a fury.

"Get out of heah, mistah!" she shrieked, stamping her foot and scowling darkly. "This is the second time you have neahly frightened me to death! Get out of heah, I say, or I'll break every bone in yo' body!" She had been so startled by Eliot's appearance and then the general outcry, that her nervousness passed into a rage. Picking up the book that Betty had been reading, she hurled it at the astonished bear with all her force. Eliot's work-basket followed next, and the pillows from the bed and sofa. Next she tore off her slippers, and sent them flying against the brown furry back now turned toward her. Not knowing what to make of such a shower of spools and needles, scissors, buttons, and wearing apparel, old Bruin dropped on all fours and ambled out of the doorway just as Lloyd caught up the water pitcher.

A panting little coloured boy met him on the stairs and caught up the rope trailing behind him. "He won't hurt you, Miss Lloyd," he called, assuringly. "He b'long to Mistah Keith an' Mistah Malcolm. They done tole me to lead him up heah, and I stopped to shet the gate an' he broke away from

me. They comin' 'long theyselves, toreckly. I b'lieve that's them a-comin' now. The beah ain't gwine to hurt you."

"Oh, I am not afraid of the beah," answered Lloyd, "but I hate to be surprised. It came walkin' in on us so easy that I didn't have time to see that it was only an old tame beah. It stood up on its hind legs lookin' twice as big as usual, and when everybody screamed and carried on so, I didn't know what I was doin'. As soon as I realised that it was the boys' pet I wasn't afraid, but it made me mad to be startled that way. And that's the second time it has happened."

"Is he gone?" asked Eugenia, poking her head slowly out from under the bed like a cautious turtle.

"Yes, Wash has him," answered the Little Colonel, laughing hysterically now that her temper had spent itself. "You girls look too funny for any use. Come down off your perch on that wardrobe, Joyce. It was only an old pet that the boys bought from a tramp one time. They keep it up at 'Fairchance,' the home that Mr. MacIntyre founded for little waifs and strays. I s'pose that is what Malcolm meant by a travellin' show. I might have thought of that, for they are always makin' it show off its tricks."

Eliot had found her voice by this time, and was

sitting limply back in her chair with her hand over her heart. "If that is their travelling show," she said, weakly, "I wish they'd choose another road. I was that scared I couldn't have spoken a word if my life had depended on it; and all the time I was trying my hardest to scream. I thought it was a wild beast that had walked in from the woods to devour us all."

"But, Eliot," said the Little Colonel, still laughing, "you know we don't have wild beasts in these woods nowadays. There hasn't been any for yeahs and yeahs."

But Eliot shook her head doubtfully, and when the boys came up with a banjo and French harp to put the bear through his performances, she watched the dancing at a respectful distance. She was not at all sure about her safety after that, as long as she was in sight of the Kentucky woods. She could not be convinced that all sorts of ravenous beasts were not lurking in their shadows, and would not have been surprised at any time to have met a live Indian in war-paint and feathers.

Eugenia's frenzied wail became a byword, and for many days one had only to say, "Oh, *don't* eat me!" to start a peal of laughter.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME STORIES AND A POEM.

"WHAT is the worst thing you evah did in yo' life, Joyce?" asked the Little Colonel. It was the first day after their recovery from the measles that the girls had been allowed to go down-stairs, and they were trying to amuse themselves in the library. Time had dragged for the last half-hour, and Lloyd's question was welcomed with interest.

"Um, I don't know," answered Joyce, half closing her eyes as she tried to remember. "I've done so many bad things that I have been ashamed of afterward, that I can hardly tell which is the worst. One of the meanest things I ever did was when I was too small to know how cruel it was. It was so long ago that I could not talk plainly, but I remember distinctly what a stifling hot day it was. Mamma had been packing her furs away for the summer in moth-balls. You know how horridly those camphor things smell. I hung over her and asked questions every time she moved. She told me how the moth-millers

lay eggs in the furs if they are not protected, and showed me an old muff that she had found in the attic, which was so badly moth-eaten that it had to be thrown away. I watched her lay the little balls all among the furs, and then tie them up in linen bags, and pack them away in a chest.

"It happened that I had an old cat named Muff, and as soon as mamma had gone down-stairs, I took it into my head to pack her away in camphor balls. So I put her into an old pillow-case with a handful of suffocating moth-balls, and tied her up tight. She mewed and scratched at a terrible rate, but I tugged away at the heavy lid of the chest until I got it open, and then pop went poor old Muff in with the other furs.

"Luckily, mamma found an astrakhan cape, several hours later, that she had overlooked, and went back to the attic to put it into the chest, or the poor cat would have smothered. When she raised the lid there was that pillow-case squirming around as if it were alive. It frightened her so that she jumped back and dropped the lid, and then stood screaming for Bridget. I didn't know what had startled her, and she did not know that I had any connection with it, for I stood looking on as innocent as a lamb, with my thumb in my mouth.

"When Bridget came and saw the pillow-case squirming and bumping around, she said, 'Shure, ma'am, an' it's bewitched them furs is, and I'd not be afther touching 'em wid a tin-fut pole. I'll run call the gard'ner next dure.' So she put her head out at the attic window and screamed for Dennis, and Dennis thought the house was on fire, and came running up the stairs two steps at a time. He untied the pillow-case and turned it upside down with a hard shake, and, of course, out bounced poor old Muff in a shower of moth-balls, nearly smothered from being shut up so long with that stifling odour. She was sick all day, and Bridget said that it was a lucky thing that cats have nine lives, or she couldn't have gotten over it.

"I cried because they had let her out, and said I didn't want the nasty moths to spoil my kitty's fur, and mamma laughed so hard that she sat right down on the attic floor. Then she took me in her lap and explained how Muff took care of her own fur, and did not need to be packed away in the summer-time."

"That makes me think of a scrape that Lloyd and I got into," said Eugenia, "when she lived in New York. We had seen a mattress sent away from the house to be renovated, and had asked the nurse all

sorts of questions about it. We concluded it would be a fine thing to renovate the mattress of one of our doll-beds. So we ripped one end open and pulled out all the cotton and excelsior it was stuffed with, and burned it in the nursery grate. Then we began to look around the house for something to refill it with.

"Down in the library was a beautiful fur rug. I don't remember what kind of a wild beast it was made from; I was so little, then, you know. But papa was very proud of it, for he had killed the animal himself out in the Rocky Mountains, and had had the skin made into a rug as a souvenir of that hunting trip. It had the head left on it, and we were a little afraid of that head. The glass eyes glared so savagely, and the teeth were so sharp in its open jaws! But the fur was long and soft and thick, and we decided to shear off a little to stuff our mattress with. We thought it wouldn't take much. So I took the nurse's scissors, and we slipped down into the library with the empty mattress-tick.

"The beast's eyes seemed to look at me in such a life-like way that I was afraid to touch it until Lloyd put a sofa pillow over its head and sat down on it. Then I began to shear off a little near the

tail, where I thought it wouldn't show much; but the mattress didn't fill up very fast. So I kept on shearing, a little farther and a little farther, here a patch and there a patch, until I had taken a great streak out of the middle of the back, and the rug was ruined."

"What did your father say?" asked Joyce.

"Oh, he was furious! He said a seven-year-old child ought to know better than to do a thing like that, and if she didn't she should be taught. But mamma wouldn't let him touch me, and only scolded the nurse for not watching me more closely."

"Now it is Betty's turn," said Joyce, when the giggling that followed Eugenia's tale had subsided. "What mischief did you get into, Betty?"

Before she could reply there was a step in the hall, a tap at the open door, and a pleasant voice said: "Good morning, young ladies."

"Oh, it is the minister's wife, Mrs. Brewster," whispered Lloyd, jumping up from the sofa and going forward to greet her.

There was no need of introductions, for the girls had met the sweet-faced old lady several times.

"Mothah isn't heah, Mrs. Brewster," said Lloyd. "She went to town this mawnin' on the early train, but we are lookin' fo' her to come on this next train.

And we are just dyin' fo' company, ou'selves. Won't you come in an' wait, please?"

Involuntarily on her arrival the girls stopped lolling in their chairs, and sat up straight, with their hands folded primly in their laps. Mrs. Brewster had an air of quiet dignity that always made people want to be on their best behaviour before her. Every one in the Valley was fond of the minister's wife, but most people stood in awe of her, and considered the turn of their sentences and the pitch of their voices when talking to her. She never had a pin awry. Her gray hair was always as smooth as a brush could make it, and every breadth of her skirts always fell in straight, precise folds. From bonnet-strings to shoe-laces there was never a wrinkle or a spot. But the Little Colonel felt no awe. She had discovered that under that prim exterior was a heart thoroughly in sympathy with all her childish joys and griefs, and in consequence the two had become warm friends. Lloyd stood beside the rocking-chair, where she had seated Mrs. Brewster, and waved a big fan so vigorously that the bonnet-strings fluttered, and a lock of gray hair was blown out of place and straggled across the placid brow.

"We were tellin' each othah about some of the worst things we evah did in ou' lives, Mrs. Brewster,"

said Lloyd. "Won't you tell us about some of the things you did when you were a naughty little girl?"

Mrs. Brewster laughed. Few people would have remembered that she had ever been a little girl, and only the Little Colonel would have dared to intimate that she had been a naughty one, for she was one of those dignified persons who look as if they had always been proper and grown up.

"That is a long time ago to look back to, dear," she began. "I was very strictly brought up, and the training of my conscience began so early that I was always a good child in the main, I think. I was more timid than my brothers and sisters, which may account for some of my goodness, and for the most daring deed I ever did, I was punished so severely that it had a restraining effect on me ever after."

"What was that?" asked Lloyd, with such an air of interest, that Mrs. Brewster, looking around on the listening faces, was beguiled into telling it.

"It was when we lived in a little New England village, and I was about eight years old. Although I was a very quiet child, I dearly loved company, and always felt a delicious thrill of excitement when I heard that the Dorcas Sewing Society was to be entertained at our house, or that some one was coming to tea. Mother thought that growing children

should eat only the simplest, most wholesome dishes, so usually we had very frugal fare. But on state occasions a great many tempting goodies were set out. I remember that we always had spiced buns and tarts and a certain kind of plum marmalade that mother had great skill in making. It was highly praised by every one. But it was not alone for these things that I was in a state of complete happiness from the time the company arrived until they departed. I enjoyed listening to every word that was said. An hour before the guests began to arrive I would station myself at the window to watch for them. I loved to see the ladies stepping primly down the garden path in their best gowns, between the stiff borders of box and privet, stopping to admire mother's hollyhocks or laburnum bushes.

"Children were seen and not heard in those days, and as soon as they had been ushered into the guest chamber, where they laid aside their wraps, and had seated themselves in the parlour, I used to carry my little stool in and sit down in one corner to listen.

"One autumn it happened that for several reasons mother had had no invited company for weeks. I was hungry for some of the tarts and marmalade that I knew would appear if the guests would only arrive, and one night a plan came into my head that seemed

to me so clever that I could hardly wait for morning to come, in order that I might carry it out.

"Mother sent me on an errand to the village store next day, and on the way I stopped at the doctor's house. I could scarcely reach the great brass knocker on the front door, but when I did, standing on tiptoe, it sent such a loud clamour through the house that my heart jumped up in my throat, and I was minded to run away. But before I could do that the doctor's wife opened the door. I made my best courtesy that mother had carefully taught me, and then was so embarrassed I could not lift my eyes from the ground. When I spoke, my voice sounded so meek and shy and high up in the air that I scarcely recognised it as mine.

"'Mrs. Mayfair, please come to tea to-morrow,' I said. Then I courtesied again, and hurried off, while Mrs. Mayfair was calling after me to tell my mother that it gave her great pleasure to accept her invitation. But you see it wasn't mother's invitation. I didn't say '*mother* says please come to tea.' I just asked them to come of my own accord, in a fit of reckless daring, and then waited to see what would happen. I invited nearly all the Dorcas Society."

"And what happened?" asked the Little Colonel, eagerly.

Mrs. Brewster laughed at the remembrance, such a contagious, hearty laugh, that her bonnet-ribbons shook.

"I never said a word about it at home, but next day, a little while before sundown, I went to the window to watch for them. Mother, who had been busy all day, boiling cider and making apple-butter, sat down with her knitting to rest a few minutes before supper. She said she was tired, and that she would not cook much; that mush and milk would be enough.

"She couldn't imagine what had happened when all the ladies appeared, and she sent me to open the door while she hurried to change her dress. I followed the usual programme; invited them into the guest-chamber to lay aside their wraps and mantles, and then gave them seats in the parlour. Mother was puzzled when she came in and saw them with their bonnets off, for she supposed, when she saw them coming down the path, that they were a committee from the Dorcas Society, on some business. But presently one of the ladies patted me on the head, and complimented my pretty manners in delivering the invitation to tea.

"If a piece of the sky had fallen, mother could not have been more surprised, but she gave no sign

of it then. She only smiled and made a pleasant answer.

"I began to feel very comfortable, and to congratulate myself on the success of my little plan. Presently she excused herself, and beckoned me to follow her out of the room. Without a word, or even a glance of reproach, she bade me run across the street and ask my Aunt Rachel and her daughter Milly to come over at once and help her prepare for the unexpected guests. They were both of them quick, capable women and fine housekeepers, and 'flew around,' as they expressed it, in such a marvellous way that at the proper time the customary feast was spread.

"It did look so good! I walked around the table, my mouth watering as I looked at the tarts and marmalade and spiced buns, and all the other tempting dishes. Mother watched me do it, and then, just before she invited the ladies out to the table, she sent me off to bed without a morsel to eat, — not even a spoonful of mush and milk.

"I lay in an adjoining room, listening to the clatter of knives and forks, and the ladylike hum of conversation, and knew that the good things were slowly but surely disappearing, and that I could not have a taste. I was so hungry and disappointed that I

cried myself to sleep. That disappointment and the lecture which followed next morning was punishment enough, and you may be sure that that was the last time I ever invited my mother's friends on my own responsibility."

Mrs. Brewster paused amid the girls' laughing exclamations, and just then Mrs. Sherman came in from the train, hot and dusty, and her arms full of little packages. "Come on up to my room with me," she said to Mrs. Brewster, who was a frequent and familiar visitor at Locust.

"Don't take her away," begged the Little Colonel, "she is entertaining us."

"My turn now," laughed Mrs. Sherman. And the two ladies went up-stairs, once more leaving the girls to the task of providing their own amusement.

"Wasn't that a picture?" said Joyce, when Mrs. Brewster had left the room. "Can't you just see it? that quaint little girl in her old-fashioned dress, going from door to door with her courtesies and her invitations, and, afterward, all the ladies coming down the stiff-bordered path between the rows of hollyhocks. I'd love to draw that picture if I could."

"Try it," urged the girls, so warmly that Joyce went up-stairs for her drawing material. Betty watched her spread her paper on the library table. "I believe

that I could put that story into rhyme," she said, after a few minutes of silent thought. "I can feel it humming in my head."

"Oh, I didn't know that you could write poetry," exclaimed Lloyd. "Try it now, and see what you can do. You write the poem, and Joyce will illustrate it."

"I have to be by myself when I write, and I never know how long it will take. It is like making butter. Sometimes it will come in a few minutes, and sometimes I have to churn away for hours."

"Begin, anyhow!" insisted the girls, and in a few minutes Betty slipped away to her room. At lunch-time they teased her to show them what she had written, but she had only a few lines completed, and would not let them see even the paper on which she had been scribbling. After lunch the others went to their rooms to write letters and sleep awhile, but she went back to her task. Joyce's picture did not turn out to her satisfaction, and she tore it up, but Betty did her work over and over, rewriting each line many times. When they were all dressed for dinner, she did not appear. Finally Joyce went to see what kept her so long. She found her bending over the paper, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining.

"It is done," she cried, writing the last word with

a flourish, "but I hadn't any idea it was so late. I thought I had been up here only a few minutes. Some of the rhymes just *wouldn't* twist into shape, but I think they fit now."

"I'm going to take it down and show it to the girls, while you dress," cried Joyce, catching up the paper and running off with it. Although Betty knew the time was short and she ought to hurry, she could not resist stealing to the banister and leaning over to hear how it sounded when her godmother, who was sitting in the lower hall with Lloyd and Eugenia, read it aloud.

Jemima Araminta knew
Whenever company
Sat round the frugal board, they had
Plum marmalade for tea.

And spicèd buns and toothsome tarts,
And divers sweets beside,
Were set to tempt the appetite
With good housewifely pride.

While walking out one day, it chanced
She fell a-pondering sore.
A wicked thought in her small mind
Did tempt her more and more.

At all the neighbours' doors she paused,
Demure and shy was she.
With downcast eyes, she courtesied,
And said, "*Please come to tea.*"

Next day along the garden path,
Just as the sun went down,
A score of ladies primly walked,
Each in her Sabbath gown.

Surprised, her mother heard them say,
"Dear child! So shy is she!
What pretty manners she did have
When asking us to tea."

Jemima now remembers well
They once had company,
Preserves and buns and toothsome tarts
When ne'er a taste had she.

For, supperless, to bed that night,
She went, severely chid;
No more the neighbours to invite,
Save at her mother's bid.

"Bravo! little girl," cried Mrs. Sherman, while the girls clapped loudly. "Have you anything else with you that you have written? If you have, bring it down with you when you come."

"Yes, godmother," answered Betty, over the banister, blushing until she could feel her cheeks burn. She was all a-tingle at the thought of her godmother seeing her verses. She wanted her to see them, and yet, — she *couldn't* take down her old ledger for them all to read and criticise. Not for worlds would she have Eugenia read her verses on "Friendship," and there

was one about "Dead Hopes" that she felt none of them would understand. They might even laugh at it.

Several minutes went by before she could make up her mind. When she went down-stairs she had put the old ledger back into her trunk and carried only one of the loose leaves in her hands.

"I'll show the others to godmother sometime when we are alone," she said to herself, as she went shyly up to the group waiting for her. "Here is one I called 'Night,'" she said, her cheeks flaming with embarrassment. "There are four verses."

Mrs. Sherman took it, and, glancing down the lines, read aloud the little poem, commencing:

> "Oh, peaceful Night, thou shadowy Queen
> Who rules the realms of shade,
> Thy throne is on the heaven's arch,
> Thy crown of stars is made."

"Oh, Betty, that's splendid!" cried the girls, in chorus. "How could you think of it?"

"It is remarkably good for a little girl of twelve," said Mrs. Sherman, glancing over the last verses again. "But I am not surprised. Your mother wrote some beautiful things. She scribbled verses all the time."

"Oh, I didn't know that!" cried Betty. "How I wish I could see some of them!"

"You shall, my dear! I have an old portfolio in the library, full of such things. Poems that she wrote and pictures that Joyce's mother drew; caricatures of the professors, the little pen and ink sketches of the places in the Valley we loved the best. I'll get them out for you, after dinner. You will all be interested in them, especially in a journal they kept for me one summer when I was at the seashore. One kept a record of all that happened in the Valley during my absence, and the other illustrated it."

"Dinner is ready now," said Lloyd, jumping up as the maid opened the dining-room door. As they all rose to go in, Mrs. Sherman lingered a moment in the hall, to take the paper from Betty's hand.

"Will you give me this little poem, dear?" she asked, slipping an arm around the child's waist. "I am very proud of my little god-daughter. The world will hear from you some day, if you keep on singing. Just do your bravest and best, and it will be glad to listen to your music."

She stooped and kissed Betty lightly on the forehead. It was as if she had set the seal of her

approval upon her, and to be approved by her beautiful godmother, — ah, that meant more to the devoted little heart than any one could dream ; far more, even, than if she had been made the proud laureate of a queen.

CHAPTER XII.

A PILLOW-CASE PARTY.

They were all sitting on the vine-covered porch, looking out between the tall white pillars into the sultry June darkness. The light from the hall lamp streamed across the steps where the four Bobs rolled and tumbled around over each other, but except for that one broad path of light they could see nothing. There was not even starlight.

"How hot and still it is," said Mrs. Sherman. "There doesn't seem to be a leaf stirring, and there's not a star in sight. I think it will surely storm before morning."

"Betty," said Joyce, "your 'shadowy queen who rules the realms of shade' has forgotten to put on her crown. Now if I could write poetry like some people I know, I would write an ode to Night and compare it to a stack of black cats. It wouldn't sound so pretty as your description, but it would be nearer the truth."

"Well, cats or queens, it doesn't make any differ-

ence what you call it," said the Little Colonel, "it's the stupidest night I evah saw. I wish something would happen. It seems ages since we have done anything lively. Now that we are ovah the measles it's wastin' time to be sittin' heah so poky and stupid. What can we do, mothah?"

"Let's tell ghost stories," said Mrs. Sherman, who knew what was going to happen in a short time, and wanted to keep the girls occupied until then. "I know a fine one," she began, sinking her voice to a creepy undertone that made the girls cast uneasy glances behind them. "It's all about a haunted house that has clanking chains in the cellar, and muffled footsteps, and icy fingers that c-lutch you by the throat on the stairs as the clock tolls the midnight hour."

"Ugh! How good and spooky!" said Joyce, with a little shiver. "I love that kind."

They drew their chairs around Mrs. Sherman to listen, so interested in the story that two of the Bobs rolled over each other and off the high porch, and nobody noticed their whining. Presently, in the most thrilling part of her story, Mrs. Sherman paused and pointed impressively down the avenue.

"Oo-oo-oo! what is it? Ghosts?" shrieked the Little Colonel, her teeth chattering, and in such

haste to throw herself into her mother's arms that her chair turned over with a bang.

"It is a pillow-case party," answered Mrs. Sherman, laughing, "but it is certainly the most ghostly-looking affair that I ever saw."

Down the long avenue toward them came a wavering line of white-sheeted, masked figures. They had square heads, and great round holes for eyes, and the candle that each one carried flashed across a hideous grinning face, whose mouth and nose had been drawn with burnt cork. The leader of this strange procession was a veritable giant, — the Goliath of all the ghosts, — for he loomed up above them to nearly twice the height of the tallest one in the line. It took two sheets to cover him; one flapped about his long thin legs, and one swung from his shoulders, swaying from side to side as he moved noiselessly along with gigantic strides.

"Oh, mothah, it's awful!" whispered the Little Colonel, clinging around Mrs. Sherman's neck.

"It is almost enough to frighten one," she replied. "But they are all friends of yours, Lloyd. For instance, the giant is nobody but your good friend and playfellow, Robby Moore, on stilts; and somewhere in that bunch of little tots at the tail end of the procession are those funny little Cassidy twins, Bethel

and Ethel. They begged so hard to be allowed to come that their mother at last consented, although they are only six years old. She said she would dress up in a sheet and pillow-case herself, and come with them, to see that nothing happened to them, so I suppose she is somewhere in the line. I was told that everybody in the neighbourhood was coming; old people as well as children, but I'll leave you to find out for yourself, as the fun of a party like this is in the guessing. They will unmask before they go home."

The procession glided on in silence until it reached the house, and then ranged itself in a long line in front of the group on the porch.

"There are thirty-eight," whispered Joyce. "I counted them. Isn't that one at the end funny? That one in a bolster-case tied at the top, and his hands sticking out of the slits at the sides, like fishes' fins. I'm almost sure that it is Keith. I could tell if I could only see his hands, but he has white stockings drawn over them."

The figures began waving to and fro, faster and faster, until they were all drawn into a weird, uncanny dance, in which each one flapped or writhed or swayed back and forth as he pleased, in ghostly silence. The movements of the ones in the bolster-

cases were the most comical, and the little audience on the porch laughed until they could only gasp and hold their sides.

At a signal from the tall leader, the sheeted party suddenly divided, half of the masked faces grinning on one side of the steps, and half going to the other. Then an auction began, one side being sold to the other. The bidding was all in pantomime, and they all looked so much alike that nobody knew whom he was bidding for, or to whom he was knocked down. The giant was the auctioneer.

At last each bidder was provided with a partner, and two by two they all went gravely up the steps to shake hands with Mrs. Sherman and the girls. Every one spoke in an assumed voice, and recognition was almost impossible. The girls talked with every one in turn, but Rob and Keith were the only boys they had recognised when the signal for unmasking was given, and little Bethel Cassidy was the only girl. They knew her queer little lisp.

Cake and sherbet were brought out, and great was everybody's astonishment when masks were slipped off, and the pillow-cases jerked away from the wearers' rumpled hair. To Keith's disgust, he found that the partner whom he had bid for energetically, thinking it was Sally Fairfax, was only his brother Mal-

colm, and Malcolm teased him all evening by quoting aloud some of the complimentary speeches Keith had whispered to him under cover of their disguises.

"Oh, gracious!" roared Malcolm. "It was *too* funny; Keith, fanning me with one of those stubby little stocking-covered fins of his, and making complimentary speeches about my eyes. Told me he would know them anywhere. And he spouted poetry, he did," added Malcolm, doubling up with another laugh. "Oh, it was *too* good! Hi, Buddy," chucking Keith under the chin, "are you of the same opinion still? Ain't they pretty, 'mine eyes so blue and tender?'"

"Aw, hush!" growled Keith, in a shamefaced sort of way, adding, in a savage undertone, "I'll make *black* eyes of 'em if you don't stop."

That was not the only odd assortment of partners, for Miss Allison had bid for plump little Mrs. Cassidy, thinking it was one of the boys in her Sunday school class; and one little maid of seven found that an old bachelor uncle had fallen to her lot.

"You see we made a wholesale affair of it," said Miss Allison to Eugenia. "We drove around the neighbourhood in two big wagonettes, and picked up whole families at a time."

"It is the jolliest surprise I ever saw," answered Eugenia, looking all around at the little groups laughing and talking over their refreshments. "It is hard to tell which are having the best time, the children or the grown people; they are all mixed up together."

As she spoke the buzz of voices ceased, for there was a sudden blinding flash of lightning and a loud peal of thunder that made the windows rattle. The storm which Mrs. Sherman had predicted would come before morning, had crept up unnoticed, and caught them unawares.

"Come inside!" cried Mrs. Sherman, as, with a furious rush and roar the wind swept across them, banging window shutters, whirling leaves and gravel in their faces, and lashing the trees until they were bent almost double. Another blinding glare of lightning followed, with such a crash of thunder that Eugenia put her fingers in her ears and screamed, and Betty hid her face in her hands.

"Hurry!" cried Mrs. Sherman. "I am afraid that some of these flying shingles, or whatever they are, will hurt some one. It is almost a cyclone."

Breathless and excited, they all hurried into the house, and banged the great front door in the face of the storm. The children tumbled into the draw-

ing-room, the smaller ones huddling in a frightened heap in the middle of the floor, until the fury of the storm was over. There was nothing to do but wait with bated breath after each vivid flash of lightning for the terrific crash that always followed, and listen to the wind outside as it fought with the sturdy tree-tops. Now and then a limb snapped in the fierce struggle, and fell to the ground with a loud crackling noise.

"I hope there will be enough of a roof left over our heads to shelter us," said Mrs. Sherman, as bricks from the chimney tops began rolling down the roof and falling to the ground below with heavy thuds.

"We expected to start home about this time," Miss Allison was saying. "We ordered the wagonettes to come back for us at ten o'clock, but it looks now as if we are storm-bound for the night. Did you ever hear such a downpour?"

"It's the clatter of the rain on the tin roof of the porch," answered Mrs. Sherman, speaking at the top of her voice in order to be heard above the deafening din of the rain and wind.

For nearly half an hour they sat waiting for the storm to pass. Several games were proposed, but none of the children wanted to play. They seemed

to feel more comfortable when they were snuggled up close against some grown person, or holding some elderly protecting hand. But gradually the lightning grew fainter and fainter, and the thunder went growling away in the distance, although the rain kept steadily on. Mrs. Sherman called for some music in the drawing-room, and while Miss Allison and Mrs. Cassidy played the liveliest duets they knew, the children drifted out into the hall and over the house as they pleased.

Most of the older boys and girls sat on the stairs in groups of twos and threes, while from the upper hall the scurry of feet, and the singsong cry that London Bridge was falling down, showed what the little ones were playing. It was after eleven o'clock when the wagonettes came rumbling up to the door. The rain had stopped, and a few stars were beginning to struggle through the clouds.

"How cold and damp it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Sherman, as she stepped out on the front porch. "The thermometer must have fallen twenty degrees since you came. You will all need wraps of some kind. Wait till I can get you some shawls and things."

"No, indeed!" every one protested. "We will wrap up in our sheets again. We do not need anything else."

There was a laughing scrimmage over the pile of sheets that had been thrown hastily into one corner of the hall, when the party ran in out of the storm. Nearly all the masks and pillow-cases were put on again, too, so that the party broke up in laughing confusion. Nobody recognised his neighbour or knew who he was bumping against as he hurried up to bid his perplexed hostess good night.

With a great cracking of whips and creaking of wheels the spectral party drove off, to the tune of "Good-night, ladies, we're going to leave you now." Far down the road the chorus came floating back to the listeners on the porch, "Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along."

"Wasn't it funny?" yawned Lloyd, as she went sleepily up the stairs. "But oh, I'm so tiahed. I believe if they had stayed much longah, I'd have fallen ovah in a heap on the flo'."

All the lights were out down-stairs, and the girls were nearly undressed, when they were surprised to hear one of the wagonettes coming back. A frantic clang of the knocker on the front door brought them all to the windows.

"Oh, Mrs. Sherman!" cried an agonised voice out of the darkness, that they recognised as Mrs. Cassidy's, "are the twins here? Bethel and Ethel?

We can't find them anywhere. I was sure that I lifted them into the wagonette myself, but every one was so disguised that I must have mistaken somebody else's children for mine."

"They are not in either wagonette," added Rob Moore's voice. "We never thought to count noses until we reached the Cassidy place, and then we found they were missing."

Hastily slipping into a wrapper, Mrs. Sherman ran down-stairs with a candle in her hand, and opened the front door. Plump little Mrs. Cassidy was standing there, wringing her hands.

"Oh, *don't* tell me that they are not here!" she cried. "Didn't you see them when you were locking up the house after we left? Then I know they're lost. They must have slipped away from the porch before the storm came up, and were playing outside somewhere when we all ran inside and shut the door. Oh, my babies!" she wailed. "If they were out in all that awful storm it has killed them, I know. Oh, why did I do such a foolish thing as to bring them? They were too little to come, I knew that. But they begged so hard, and they looked so cute in those little ruffled pillow-cases, that I hadn't the heart to refuse. Oh, what shall I do?"

"They must be somewhere about the house," said

Mrs. Sherman, with such decision that Mrs. Cassidy was comforted, and began wiping her eyes.

"Come in, and help me search. Maybe they slipped up-stairs when the other children were playing, and went to sleep in some dark corner. Come on, boys. Light up the house from attic to cellar, and see who will be first to find them. It will be a game of hunt the twins, instead of hunt the slipper."

Then up-stairs, and down-stairs, and in my lady's chamber, went a strange procession, for nearly every one was still draped in sheet and pillow-case. Into closets, behind screens, in all the corners, and under all the beds they looked. Keith, remembering the sad story of Ginevra, even lifted the lid of every chest and trunk in the linen room. Poor little Mrs. Cassidy followed, wringing her hands, and sobbing that she knew that they had been shut outside in the storm and the night. Suddenly, when they had been all over the house for the third time, she caught up a lamp, and ran out in the dark, like some poor mad creature, calling, "Oh, Bethel! Oh, my little Ethel! Don't you hear your mother?"

By this time, the servants' quarters were aroused, and Mrs. Sherman, now really alarmed, called for Walker and Alec to bring lanterns. The lawn was

a wreck, strewn with leaves and fallen limbs and pieces of broken flower urns that had been overturned by the wind. The searchers stumbled over them as they waded through the wet grass, looking in every nook and corner where it was possible for a child to have strayed, but their search was in vain. Never a trace did they find of the lost twins.

"Stay in the house, girls," said Mrs. Sherman, as she caught up the trail of her wrapper, and ran out to follow the flickering lanterns and Mrs. Cassidy's frantic cries. "It might give you your death of cold to expose yourselves so soon after the measles."

As they stood in the door watching the wavering lights, Lloyd exclaimed, "The puppies are gone, too. I wonder where they can be. Maybe they were left outside in the storm when we all ran indoors in such a hurry. Maybe the twins were playing with them."

She leaned out of the door, peering into the night. "Heah, Bob!" she called, snapping her fingers, and whistling the shrill signal she always gave when she fed them. There was no response from the darkness outside, and she turned indoors repeating the whistle, and calling, "Heah, Bob! Heah, puppy! Come to yo' miss!"

In answer there was a stir under the low Persian

couch in the library, then a whine, and an inquiring little nose was thrust through the heavy knotted fringe that draped the lower part of the couch. The next instant Lloyd's Bob came sprawling joyously toward her, his pink bow cocked rakishly over one ear. Lloyd dropped on her knees, and, lifting the fringe, looked under. Then she gave an excited scream.

"Heah they are!" she called. "I've found them! Heah's the twins, and all the Bobs!"

"They're found!" called Joyce, running out on the porch and shouting the news until the searchers farthest from the house heard, and ran joyfully back. "They're found! Lloyd's found them!"

"Who ever would have thought of squeezing into such a place as that?" said Miss Allison, as she came running in, out of breath. "I started to look under that couch twice, but it was so low I thought they couldn't possibly have crawled under. Besides, some one was sitting on it all evening, and they surely would have been seen if they had attempted it."

Rob and Malcolm lifted the couch and set it aside, and there, curled up on two fat sofa cushions, with the puppies beside them, lay the twins fast asleep. Great beads of perspiration stood on their foreheads and trickled down their dimpled faces. Their hair

curled in little wet rings all over their heads, and their chubby arms and necks were red with prickly heat.

"It is a wonder that they weren't smothered," cried Mrs. Cassidy, taking them up in her arms and waking them with her tearful kisses. "Oh, *why* did you hide away from mother, precious?" she asked, reproachfully, as Bethel's eyes opened with a dazed stare at the crowd of faces around her. She leaned her head heavily on her mother's shoulder, for she was not fully awake, and clung around her neck with both arms. Finally, in answer to the chorus of questions that came from all sides, she roused enough to answer.

"It lightened, that's why we hid. Mammy Chloe thed if you go get in a dark plathe on a pile of feath-eths, no lightnin' can hurt you. Mammy Chloe always puth uth in the middle of her feather-bed. Tho me and thithter took a thofa pillow and got under the thofa and shut our eyeth tight. We wath hot," she added, gravely, "and tho wath the puppieth, but the lightnin' couldn't get uth."

The laugh that went up from the amused listeners aroused both the twins so thoroughly that they joined in without knowing what they were laughing about. Then Alec and Walker carried them triumphantly on

their shoulders to the wagonette, and once more the party started homeward. This time they moved off without singing, but from the gate came back three cheers for the twins, then three cheers for the Little Colonel, who had found them. Once started to cheering, somebody proposed three for the pillow-case party, and so lustily did they give them, that an old rooster, awakening from sleep as the wheels creaked by, thought it the call of some giant chanticleer, and promptly crowed an answering challenge, that was echoed by every cock in the Valley.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE MEASLES.

It seemed to Betty that that night would never end. It was after midnight before the house grew quiet. Then, whenever she closed her eyes, she could see those ghostly figures dancing before her in a long, white wavering line. After awhile she gave up the attempt to sleep, and lay with her eyes wide open, staring into the darkness, alert, and quivering at the slightest sound.

"I don't know what makes me so nervous," she thought. "I feel as if I should fly, and the dark seems so horrible, as if it was full of creepy, crawling things, with horns and claws."

A beetle boomed against the window, striking the pane with a heavy thud. She drew the sheet over her head and shivered. "Maybe if I'd read awhile it would make me sleepy," she thought, and, slipping softly out of bed, she groped her way across the room in the dark to the dressing-table. Lighting a candle in one of the crystal candlesticks that always re-

minded her of twisted icicles, she put it on a stand beside her bed. The light flickered unsteadily, but she piled the pillows up behind her and settled herself to read.

It was a new book that she was greatly interested in, and before long she was so deep in the story that she never noticed how the time was flying. Instead of bringing sleep to her eyes, it seemed to drive it farther and farther away. The candle burned lower and lower, but she never noticed it, and read on by its unsteady light until she heard the hall clock strike four. The candle was flickering in its socket, and the June dawn was beginning to streak the sky. Her eyes smarted and burned, and ached with a dull throbbing pain.

She turned over and went to sleep then, and slept so heavily that she did not hear the noises of the awakening household. Once Mrs. Sherman came to the door and peeped in, but, finding her asleep, tiptoed out again. It was nearly noon when she awoke, feeling as tired as when she went to bed. She dressed languidly and went down-stairs, but was so unlike her usually sunny self, that Mrs. Sherman watched her anxiously. Late in the afternoon she sent for Doctor Fuller, and a general wail went up when he announced what was the matter with her

"More measles, Mrs. Sherman," he said, cheerfully. "Well, this is the most extraordinary house party I ever heard of. You seem to be exceedingly partial to this one line of amusements."

"It isn't fair for Betty to have it," exclaimed Joyce, "when she wouldn't go to the camp, and she's had it before! It's just too bad!"

"We'll all have to be mighty good to her," said the Little Colonel, "for she was so sweet about amusing us. We'll take turns reading to her and entertaining her, for she stayed hours with us in that dark room when she could have been outdoors enjoying herself."

"That is probably the reason she is laid up now," answered the doctor. "She should have kept entirely away from you."

"But she had had one case," explained Mrs. Sherman, "and we never dreamed of her having another. Poor little thing! I hope this will be light. She had a hard time before, so we must make a regular frolic of this, girls."

"Well, no, madam, at least not for several days," said the doctor, gravely, "And you must be extremely careful about her eyes. They seem to be badly affected, and I must warn you that they are really in danger."

They told Betty that afterward, thinking it would stop her crying, when everything else failed to do so, if she realised how necessary it was for her not to inflame them with her tears. Usually she was a sensible little body, obedient to the slightest suggestion, but now she lay curled up in a disconsolate little heap in bed, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Oh, I don't want to have the measles!" she sobbed, catching her breath in great gasps. "Oh, I don't *want* to!"

"My dear little girl, don't let it distress you so!" begged Mrs. Sherman, leaning over and tenderly wiping the flushed little face.

"It will not be any worse for you than for the other girls, and in a few days when you feel better we are going to have all sorts of sport out of it. The girls are planning now what they shall do to make up to you for this disappointment. They feel as if they are to blame for bringing this illness upon you by their disobedience, and you cannot imagine how bad it makes them feel to have you take it to heart so bitterly."

But even that failed to stop her tears, and presdently Mrs. Sherman went out into the hall, where the girls were waiting for her.

"There is some reason for all this distress that I

am unable to discover," she said. "Joyce, maybe if you would go in and talk to her you might find out."

"She must be lots worse than we were," whispered Eugenia to Lloyd, as the high, shrill voice, so unlike Betty's usual tones, went on complainingly in the next room.

"Hush!" warned Lloyd. "She's telling Joyce what the matter is." The words came out to them distinctly. She was speaking with a nervous quickness as if her fever had almost reached delirium.

"I was trying to dig one of those roads," wailed Betty, in a high, querulous voice. "One that would last for ever, don't you know? like the one they built for Tusitala. You *do* know, don't you?" she insisted, feverishly, but Joyce had to acknowledge that she had never heard of it, and Betty cried again, because she felt too nervous and ill to explain.

"There, there! never mind!" said Joyce, soothingly, thinking that Betty's mind was wandering. "You can tell me all about it when you get well."

"But I want you to know *now!*" sobbed Betty, with all the unreasoning impatience of a sick child. "It is all in my 'Good times book.' I cut it out of an old *Youth's Companion*, just after I came, and the piece is inside the cover of that little white and gold

book in the writing-desk. Read it, won't you? Then you will understand."

Joyce took the slip of paper to the window, and glanced rapidly along the lines.

"No, read it aloud!" demanded Betty, fretfully. "I want to hear it, too. It is such a sweet story, and I read it over every day to help me remember."

Mrs. Sherman and the girls, sitting outside the door, leaned forward to listen, as Joyce read aloud the newspaper clipping that Betty counted among her chief treasures. This is what they heard:

"THE ROAD OF THE LOVING HEART."[1]

"Remembering the great love of his highness, Tusitala, and his loving care when we were in prison and sore distressed, we have prepared him an enduring present, this road which we have dug for ever."

In a far-off island, thousands of miles from the mainland, and unconnected with the world by cable, stands this inscription. It was set up at the corner of a new road, cut through a tropical jungle, and bears at its head the title of this article, signed by the names of ten prominent chiefs. This is the story of the road, and why it was built:

Some years ago a Scotchman, broken in health and expecting an early death, sought out this lonely spot, because here the climate was favourable to the disease from which he suffered. He settled here for what remained to him of life.

[1] Editorial in old copy of *Youth's Companion*.

He bought an estate of several hundred acres, and threw himself earnestly into the life of the natives of the island. There was great division among the many chiefs, and prolonged warfare. Very soon the chiefs found that this alien from a strange land was their best friend. They began coming to him for counsel, and invited him to their most important conferences.

Though he did not bear that name, he became a missionary to them. He was their hero, and they loved and trusted him because he tried to lead them aright. They had never had such a friend. And so it came about that when the wars ceased, the chiefs of both sides called him by a name of their own, and made him one of their own number, thus conferring upon him the highest honour within their power.

But many of the chiefs were still in prison, because of their political views or deeds, and in constant danger of being put to death. Their sole friend was the Scotchman, whom they called Tusitala. He visited them, comforted them, repeated passages from the history of Christ to them, and busied himself incessantly to effect their release.

At length he obtained their freedom, and then, glowing with gratitude, in despite of age, decrepitude, and loss of strength, they started directly for the estate of their benefactor, and there, in the terrible heat, they laboured for weeks in building him a road which they knew he had long desired. Love conquered weakness, and they did not cease their toil until their handiwork, which they called "The Road of the Loving Heart," was finished.

Not long after this the white chief suddenly died. At the news the native chiefs flocked from all parts of the island to the house, and took charge of the body. They kissed his hand as they came in, and all night sat in silence about him.

One of them, a feeble old man, threw himself on his knees beside the body of his benefactor, and cried out between his sobs:

"I am only a poor black man, and ignorant. Yet I am not afraid to come and take the last look of my dead friend's face. Behold, Tusitala is dead. We were in prison and he cared for us. The day was no longer than his kindness. Who is there so great as Tusitala? Who is there more loving-compassionate? What is your love to his love?"

So the chiefs took their friend to the top of a steep mountain which he had loved, and there buried him. It was a mighty task.

The civilised world mourns the great author. The name of Robert Louis Stevenson is lastingly inwrought into English literature. But the Samoans mourn in his loss a brother, who outdid all others in loving-kindness, and so long as the island in the Pacific exists, Tusitala will be gratefully remembered, not because he was so greatly gifted, but because he was a good man.

The phrase, "The Road of the Loving Heart," is a gospel in itself. "The day is not longer than his kindness" is a new beatitude. Fame dies, and honours perish, but "loving-kindness" is immortal.

Joyce finished and looked up inquiringly. She still did not see what connection the road could have with Betty's distress over the measles.

"Now, don't you see?" asked Betty, tremulously. "It is for godmother that I wanted to build that road, for ever since I came she has been like Tusitala to me. 'The day is no longer than her kind

ness.' Oh, Joyce, nobody knows how good she has been to me!" Then between her sobs she told Joyce again the story of the gold beads, and the many things her godmother had done to make her visit a continual delight. Mrs. Sherman, outside the door, felt her eyes grow dim and her cheeks wet, as the child babbled on, reciting a long list of little kindnesses that she had treasured in her memory, and that her godmother had either done unconsciously, or had forgotten long ago.

It showed how hungry the poor little heart had been, that such trifles could make it brim over with gratitude. She wiped her eyes more than once as the voice went on.

"Of course I couldn't dig a road like those chiefs did, and she wouldn't have wanted one, even if I could; but I thought maybe I could leave a memory behind me when this beautiful visit is done, that would be like a smooth, white road. You know remembering things is like looking back over a road. At least it always seemed that way to me, and the unpleasant things that have happened are like the stones and rocks that we stumble over. But if there haven't been any unpleasant things to remember, then we can look back and see it stretched out behind us, all smooth and white and shining.

"So I tried from the very first of my visit to leave nothing behind me for her memory to stumble over; not a frown, a cross word, or a single disobedience. That's why I wouldn't go with you that day to have my fortune told. It would have spoiled my 'Road of the Loving Heart,' and put a stone in it that would always have made godmother sorry when she thought of my visit.

"That's why I came back from the picnic at the old mill and missed the charades. It would have spoiled the road if I hadn't kept my promise, — kept it to the utmost. And now after all the days I have tried so hard, it is going to be spoiled because I've gone and got sick. I'll be so much care and trouble that the Memory Road will be all spoiled — my 'Road of the Loving Heart!'"

Betty was so exhausted by this time, that she was not crying any longer; but now and then a long sob shook the little body from head to foot. Joyce, not knowing what to say, slipped away and went out into the hall.

"So that is the cause of the child's distress," whispered Mrs. Sherman. "Bless her little heart, now I've found out what is the matter, maybe I can succeed in quieting her."

What she said to comfort her the girls never knew.

for the door closed behind her and they stole away to their own rooms.

But presently they heard the "White Seal's Lullaby" sung softly within. She had taken Betty in her arms, and was rocking her as tenderly as she had rocked the Little Colonel, while she sang, "Oh, hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us."

When Betty fell asleep it was in the embrace of something far more comforting and restful than the "arms of the slow-swinging seas." For the first time in her life since she could remember, she felt what it was to be folded fast in the mother-love that she had always longed for.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LONG NIGHT.

"Oh, isn't it awful!" exclaimed the Little Colonel, in a shocked tone, and with such a look of horror in her face that Eugenia leaned forward to listen. Lloyd was speaking to Joyce on the porch just outside of the library window, where Eugenia sat reading.

"What is awful?" asked Eugenia, her curiosity aroused by the expression of the girls' faces.

"Sh!" whispered Lloyd, warningly, as she tiptoed to the window and sat down on the broad, low sill. "I am afraid Betty will hear us talking about her. The doctor has just been here, and he says — oh, Eugenia, it is too terrible to tell — he says he is afraid that Betty is going *blind!*"

The tears stood in the Little Colonel's eyes. "You know that people do lose their sight sometimes when they have the measles, and her eyes have been the worst part of it from the start. The night before the measles broke out on her she read till nearly morning by candle-light, because she was restless and

couldn't go to sleep. Of course that made them worse."

"*Blind!*" echoed Eugenia, closing her own eyes a moment on the bright summer world without, and feeling a chill run over her, as she realised what black dungeon walls those five letters could build around a life.

"Was the doctor sure, Lloyd? Can't something be done?"

"Of co'se he wasn't *suah.* I heard him tell mothah that he wouldn't give up fighting for her sight as long as there was a shadow of a chance to have it, but he advised her to send for an oculist to consult with him, and she's just now telephoned to the city for one."

"Does Betty know it?"

"She knows that there is dangah of her losing her sight, and is tryin' so hahd to be quiet and patient."

Eugenia laid down her book, feeling faint and sick. For a long time after Lloyd and Joyce had left her she sat idly playing with the curtain cord, thinking over what they had told her. Presently she tiptoed up-stairs to her room. She stood a moment outside Betty's door, listening, for Betty was talking to Eliot, and she wanted to hear what a person with such a prospect staring her in the face would have to say.

"There are lots of beautiful things in the world to think about, Eliot," Betty was saying bravely, in her sweet, cheery little voice.

"'Specially when you've lived in the country and have all the big outdoors to remember. Now while I'm so hot I love to count up all the cool things I can remember. I like to pretend that I'm down in the orchard, way early in the morning, with a fresh breeze blowing through the apple-blossoms and the dewdrops shining on every blade of grass. Oh, it smells so fresh and sweet and delicious! Now I'm in the corn-fields and the tall green corn is rustling in the wind, and the morning-glories climb up every stalk and shake the dew out of their purple bells. Now I can hear the bucket splash down in the well, and come up cold and dripping. And now I'm dabbling my fingers in the spring down in the old stone spring house, and standing on the cold, wet rocks in my bare feet. And there's the winter mornings, Eliot, when the trees are covered with sleet till every twig twinkles like a diamond. And the frost on the window-panes — oh, if I could only lay my face against the cold glass now, how good it would feel!"

Eugenia could bear no more. She turned away from the door, and, meeting Mrs. Sherman on the threshold of her room, threw herself into her arms,

sobbing: "Oh, Cousin Elizabeth, I can't stand it. If Betty goes blind it will be all my fault! She never would have had the measles if it hadn't been for me. But I would go, and I made the others go, too. And when Betty refused I was so mean and hateful to her! Oh, Cousin Elizabeth, what can I do?"

Mrs. Sherman drew Eugenia into her room and comforted her the best she could, but her own heart was heavy. She knew that Doctor Fuller had little hope of saving Betty's sight.

That knowledge threw a shadow over the entire household. The great oculist came, and gravely shook his head over the case. "There is one chance that she may see again," he said, "one in a hundred. That is all. Now if she could have a trained nurse who could watch her eyes constantly and follow directions to the letter —"

"She shall have anything!" interrupted Mrs. Sherman. "Everything that would help in the smallest degree."

"And it would be best not to let the child know," he continued. "It would probably excite her, and, above all things, that must be guarded against."

But Betty, lying with bandaged eyes, caught a whisper, felt the suppressed sympathy in the atmos-

phere, as one feels the tingle of electricity in the air before a storm, and began to guess the truth. When the trained nurse came and gave such careful attention to the treatment of her eyes, she was sure of it. But she said nothing of her suspicions, and they thought she had none.

One day Lloyd came into the room with a newspaper in her hand. Eugenia and Joyce followed softly. Lloyd tried to speak calmly, but there was a suppressed excitement in her voice as she exclaimed, "Betty, I've got the loveliest thing to show you. Mothah said I might be the one to tell, 'cause I'm so glad and proud, I don't know what to do. You know that little poem that you gave to mothah, called 'Night?' Well, she sent it away to an editah, and he has published it in this papah with yo' name at the bottom, — Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis! Now aren't you stuck up? We are all so proud of you we don't know what to do."

Betty stretched out one trembling hand for the paper, and involuntarily the other went up to her eyes to push away the bandages. "Let me see it," she cried, eagerly, but the thrill of gladness in her voice died in a pitiful little note of despair as she whispered, brokenly, "Oh, I forgot! I can't see!"

But the next instant her hand was groping for the

paper again. "Where is it?" she asked. "Let me feel it, anyway. Oh, to think that something I have written has really been published! Where is it, Lloyd? Put my hand on the spot, please. You don't know how glad I am, how glad and thankful. I have always wanted to write — always hoped that some day, after I had tried years and years, I might be able to do something good enough to be published, but to have it come now while I am a little girl," — her voice sunk almost to a whisper, — "oh, Lloyd you don't know how wonderful it seems to me!"

She was trembling so that the paper shook in her hands. "Where is it?" she asked again, feeling blindly over the page.

"There," said Lloyd, placing the little groping finger on a spot at the head of a column. "There is the word *NIGHT*, and heah," guiding her fingers down the page, "heah is yo' name. If I were you I'd be so stuck up I wouldn't speak to common people that can't have verses published in the papah."

"But — oh — if you couldn't — *see* — it!" Betty's words came in choking little gasps. She paused a moment and turned her face away, swallowing hard. Then she went on more calmly.

"Wasn't it queer that I should have written about Night, just before mine begun? That the only thing

I shall ever have published should be called that? My long, long night! But there are no stars in this night. Lloyd, it's awful to think you'll always be in the dark!"

Lloyd turned with a startled glance to the other girls.

"I — I don't know what you mean," she stammered.

"Yes, you do," insisted Betty. "What you've been trying to keep from me, all of you, that I am always going to be — *blind!*"

She ended the sentence with a little shiver, and, choking with sobs, turned her face to the wall. At a sign from the nurse, Lloyd slipped away and ran to her mother's room. She found Eugenia already there, with her head buried in Mrs. Sherman's lap.

"Oh, it almost broke my heart!" she was saying. "To see those poor little fingers groping over the paper feeling for the poem that she couldn't see. And she said so pitifully, 'My long, long night! There are no stars in this night!' And to think it's all my fault! Oh, it is just killing me! I could hardly sleep last night for thinking of it, and when I did I had a dreadful nightmare.

"I dreamed that I was in a great market-place going from stall to stall, trying to buy something,

but I had forgotten what it was I wanted. A horrid grinning little dwarf, with great fangs in his jaw, like a boar's tusks, followed me everywhere, carrying my purse. I'd stand awhile in front of every stall, trying to remember what it was I'd come for, and when I'd thought awhile I'd cry out, 'Now I know what I want, give me my own way. It is my own way that I want.' Everybody in the market would stop to listen, and the man behind the counter would say, 'Not unless you can pay the price.'

"Then that horrible dwarf would step up, grinning, his old tusks showing all hideous and yellow, and say, 'Here is the price! Give her her own way. Here is the price. Let the whole world see the price that she has paid for her own way, — Betty's eyes is the price. Betty's beautiful brown eyes!' And then he would hold them out in his ugly knotted hand, and they would look up at me so reproachfully, that I would scream and tear my hair. I don't know how many times I had to go through that scene in my sleep, but when I got up this morning I was as tired as if I had been running all night, and every place I turn I can see that hideous old hand thrust out at me with Betty's brown eyes in it. I'll never insist on having my own way again."

There was no time for Mrs. Sherman to comfort

Eugenia then, for Betty needed her, and in answer to the nurse's summons she hurried away to soothe the child, sorely distressed by this turn that the house party had taken.

"Go out on the ponies for awhile," she said, as she left the three girls sitting disconsolately on the floor. "Go out and get some of this summer sunshine into your faces and voices so that you can bring it back to Elizabeth. She will need all that you can bring her, poor child; so, instead of brooding over your own feelings, think of something that you can do to cheer her up."

In a little while there was a clatter of ponies' hoofs down the avenue, and Mrs. Sherman, sitting by the window in Betty's room, waved her hand to Eugenia, Joyce, and the Little Colonel as they rode away. They were gone all morning, and when they came back the June sunshine had done its work. Their faces were bright and smiling, and they giggled continuously as they bumped into each other, running up the stairs.

Betty's door was open, and to their surprise they heard a little laugh as they stopped to peep in. She was lying back among the pillows with bandaged eyes, but there was a smile on her lips.

"Come in, girls," she cried. "Godmother and I

are making alphabet rhymes. We started at A, and have been taking turns. She has just made a good one: 'P is a pie-man, portly and proud, pugnaciously prattling' — What's the rest of it, godmother? You tell them. I have forgotten."

But Mrs. Sherman's rhyme was broken short in an astonished exclamation, as her glance fell on the Little Colonel.

"Why, Lloyd Sherman!" she cried. "What have you been doing? Your dress is torn to tatters, and you are so dirty and dusty that I can scarcely believe that you are my child!"

The Little Colonel screwed herself around to look at the back of her dress-skirt, which was torn into a dozen ragged strips, and fluttered behind her in long fringes. There was a three-cornered tear on the shoulder and a hole in the elbow of her sleeve.

"Reckon I must have toah it gettin' through a bob-wiah fence," she answered, cheerfully. "But, look at Eugenia! She's as much of a sight as I am, with her hair hangin' all in her eyes, like an ole witch, and that scratch across her face, and her stockings full of burrs."

"Joyce is nearly as bad!" cried Eugenia; "both hair ribbons gone, the heel lost off one shoe, grass

stains on her dress, and her face red as a turkey gobbler's, from running so fast."

"Where *have* you all been, and what have you been doing?" demanded Mrs. Sherman so emphatically that, with much giggling and exclaiming, they all began to talk at once.

"We met the boys ovah on the pike," began the Little Colonel, "Malcolm and Keith and Robby, and we were all ridin' along as polite as anything, when the boys began to tell about the good times they used to have playin' Indian."

"But first," interrupted Joyce, "Keith told about the time they tied his little cousin Ginger to a tree in the woods, and left her there until it was so dark she nearly had a spasm."

"Yes," said Eugenia, "and I said what a pity it was that we were too old to play Indian; that I had had the blues all day, and felt that nothing would do me so much good as to get out some place where nobody could hear, and yell and carry on at the top of my voice. And Malcolm said that, just for once, supposing we'd pretend like we were ten years old, instead of thirteen, and pitch in and have a good ripping, tearing old game of Indian. It was away up the pike, where there was nothing in sight but a few farmhouses, scattered along the road, and it didn't

seem as if it would make any difference, so we said we would."

"First thing I knew," broke in Joyce, "Robby Moore gave an outlandish war-whoop right in my ear, that nearly deafened me, and grabbed me by my hair, yelling he was going to tomahawk me. And I saw Eugenia go sailing up the road as fast as her horse could carry her, with Keith after her, swinging on to those two long black braids of hers. You see Lloyd had the advantage of us with her short hair. They couldn't scalp her so easily; but Malcolm chased after her like all possessed."

"Maybe you think it wasn't excitin'" said the Little Colonel. "I felt like a real suah 'nuff Indian was aftah me, and I screeched bloody murdah till you could have heard me almost to the old mill."

"I should say she did!" giggled Joyce. "The way Tarbaby got over the ground was something to remember, and the way Lloyd yelled would have made a wild coyote take to its heels. Just as we got in sight of the toll-gate, we met one of those big three-story huckster-wagons, full of chickens and ducks and things. You know how funny they always look, with so many bills and legs and tails sticking through the slats. Well, the horses shied as we

went dashing up to them, and first thing we knew they had backed that wagon into a ditch at the side of the road, and one of the coops went off the top ke-bang! into the ditch."

"You never saw anything madder than that old huckster," interrupted Eugenia. "He jumped down off the wagon, and came up to us with a big whip in his hands, scolding, as cross as two sticks. But he couldn't stay angry with those boys. They were so polite, and apologised, and said if they had done anything wrong they wanted to make it right. They offered to pay for the coop if it was broken, and got off their horses to help him lift it on to the wagon again. But when they took hold of it three chickens flopped out of the broken side, and went squawking across the fields."

"It was *so* funny!" laughed Lloyd. "There they went, legs stretching, wings flapping, lickety split! It made me think of Papa Jack's story about the old witch: 'she ran, she flew, she ran, she flew!' We all told the old huckstah we'd help him catch them and that's why we got so dirty."

"Oh, such a chase!" added Joyce. "Through barb-wire fences, over ploughed fields and into blackberry briers. That is how we got so scratched and torn. But we caught the chickens, and brought

"'BUT WE CAUGHT THE CHICKENS AND BROUGHT THEM BACK.'"

them back, with feathers flying, and with them squawking at the tops of their voices."

"What fun it must have been!" said Betty. "I wish I could have seen you then, and I wish I could see you now. You must be wrecks."

"They are not pretty sights, I can assure you," said Mrs. Sherman, laughing in spite of her disapproval. "I'm astonished that you would make such a commotion on a public road, and I'm afraid I would have to lecture you a little if I were not sure that you would never do it again. Run along now and make yourselves presentable for lunch, and first thing you do, look in your mirrors. You'll not be charmed, I'm sure."

"One little, two little, three little Indians," sang Betty, as they skipped out of the room, hand in hand, and Joyce whispered in the hall, "How can she be so cheerful? She's the bravest little thing I ever saw."

They learned the secret of her cheerfulness next time they went to her room. She turned to them with a wistful little smile, sadder, somehow, than tears, saying, "Godmother has helped me to find some stars in my long night, girls. She told me about Milton. I didn't know before that he was blind when he wrote 'Paradise Lost.' And she

told me about Fanny Crosby, too, the blind hymn-writer, whose hymns have helped so many people and are sung all over the world.

"I've made up my mind that if the doctor can't save my sight I'll do as they did. It's like dropping the curtains on the outside darkness when night comes on, godmother says, and turning up the lights and stirring the fire, and making it so bright and cheerful and sweet inside that you forget how dark it is outdoors.

"And maybe if I can do that, and think all the time about the beautiful things I have seen and read, I can make up stories some day as they did their poems and hymns. I will write fairy tales that the children will love to listen to and ask to hear, over and over again. I know I can do it, for the ones I've made for Davy he likes best of all. I'd never hope to write stories that grown people would be interested in, and love as they love Tusitala's, but just to be the children's 'tale-teller,' and to write stories that they would listen to long after I am dead and gone — why *that* would be worth living for, even if I never saw the light again. And godmother thinks I can do it."

"I know you can," assented Lloyd, warmly, "and we'll copy them for you, and send them away to be put into books."

"Joyce," asked Betty, "would you mind reading that little newspaper clipping to the girls about the Road of the Loving Heart? I want them to know about it, too."

She did not know that they had already heard it, listening outside her door with heavy hearts and troubled faces, and when Joyce had found it and again read it aloud, she told them the story of the memory road that she was trying to leave behind her.

"It will be harder to do now that I am blind," she said, at the last, "for I can't help being a care and a trouble to everybody, everywhere I go now. But godmother says people won't mind that much if I'll only be pleasant and cheerful about my misfortune, and not let it cast its shadow on other lives any more than I can help. I haven't said anything about it yet to her, but if there is enough money in the bank that papa left to educate me with, I want to go to a school for the blind and learn to read those queer raised letters, and to do everything for myself. Then I'll not be such a trouble to everybody."

"But how can you be cheerful and pleasant, and go on that way for a whole lifetime?" asked Eugenia, with a shiver. "You may live to be an old, old woman."

"Oh, Eugenia!" exclaimed Joyce, in a shocked undertone. "Don't remind the poor little thing of of that."

"I know," answered Betty, her smile all gone now, and her lip trembling. "Sometimes when I think of that, it's so awful that I can hardly stand it. But it will be only a day at a time, and if I can manage to get through them one by one, and keep my courage up to the end, it will be all right afterward, you know, for there is no night *there*. The nurse read me that yesterday out of Revelation. That's the only thing that comforts me sometimes." She repeated it in a soft whisper, turning her face away: "There'll be *no night there!*"

CHAPTER XV.

"THE ROAD OF THE LOVING HEART."

JOYCE sat with her elbows on her dressing-table and her chin in her hands, gazing thoughtfully into the mirror. She had just come from Betty's room, and the child's patient cheerfulness, in the face of the dark future that threatened her, had brought the tears to her eyes.

"Dear little Betty!" she said to her reflection in the mirror. "What a beautiful memory of her we will all carry away with us! There isn't a single thing I would want to forget about her. She will be leaving each one of us a Road of the Loving Heart to look back on. And it's like the work of the old Samoan chiefs, too! Built to last for ever. It frightens me to think that what I've done is going to be remembered for ever and ever and ever; but that is what Mrs. Sherman said: '*The memories we dig into our souls will go with us into eternity.*'

"If I should die right now, what a lot of things I would want people to forget about me; especially

the family. I've been so mean to Jack and so selfish with Mary. I'm going to begin the minute I get back to the little brown house to start to make a memory road for everybody, that I need not be ashamed of when I lie a-dying."

Then she gave a shamefaced little glance at her reflection in the mirror. "No, that's putting it off too long. That is one of my worst habits. I'll begin this minute and write that letter to mamma that I have been putting off all week. And I'll take time to make it interesting, and write all the little things that I know she wants to hear about. And I'll not be so snappish with Eugenia, and make her feel that she was most to blame about our getting the measles. I've taken a mean sort of pleasure in doing it before. Poor thing, she seems to feel dreadfully bad about it, and there's no use my adding anything to her distress." And Joyce, jumping up, took out her writing materials, and sat down at her desk.

At the same moment the Little Colonel was hanging around the door waiting for Mrs. Sherman, who sat in the room until Betty fell asleep. There was a lingering tenderness in Lloyd's kiss as she threw her arms around her mother's neck, and, though no word was spoken, Mrs. Sherman knew that Lloyd had taken Betty's little sermon to heart.

"Where is Eugenia, dear?" she asked.

"She has gone to her room, I think."

"I want to have a little talk with her. She has seemed so miserable and unhappy, since all this happened. The poor child has nearly made herself ill worrying about it."

Across the hall Eugenia had thrown herself down on her bed, and was staring out of the windows. She saw nothing of the summer skies outside, or any of all that outdoor brightness. Her gaze was turned inward on herself.

"I wish I could begin at the beginning and do it all over, — all my life!" she thought. "Somehow I've always thought it rather smart to say and do exactly as I pleased; to be the ringleader in all the mischief and make the teachers dread me, and have the girls afraid of me. But Betty makes you look at things so differently. I'd give anything I've got to have people remember me as they will her. What must papa think of me? I'm all he's got, and he is so good to me! Oh, it would have been better if I had never been born! Every day I've lived I've left a whole road full of stones for somebody to jolt over. Poor old Eliot can't think of me as anything else than an imp of selfishness, for I'm always making it hard for her, and she's a 'stranger in a strange

land,' and I ought to have remembered that she has feelings as well as I have, even if she is a servant. And now Betty's eyes — "

She turned over on the bed, face downward, and began to cry. It was just then that Mrs. Sherman tapped at the door. For almost an hour Lloyd could hear the low murmur of voices going on inside the room, and knew that Eugenia was hearing now what she had always most sorely needed, a sympathetic, motherly talk. If she could have had that loving advice, those straightforward words of warning, long ago, how much they might have done for the motherless child. As it was, that hour opened Eugenia's eyes to many things, and awakened a desire to grow more like the gentle woman beside her, sweet and sincere, unselfish and helpful.

Great was Mr. Forbes's surprise one day, when he opened a letter from Eugenia in the dining-room at the Waldorf, to find that it covered eight pages, and was blistered in several places, as if she had dropped a tear or two as she wrote. Usually she had a favour to ask when she wrote, and scrawled only a page or two; but this told the story of Betty's blindness, her own part in the affair, and all that she had learned about the Road of the Loving Heart. The newspaper clipping that Betty had treasured was enclosed, that

he might read for himself the story of Tusitala that had left such an impression on her.

The letter touched him as nothing had done for years, and he read it a second time while he was going up to his office on the elevated. Then at lunch-time, while he waited in his club-room, for lunch to be served, he took it out and read it again. All that busy day between the demands that business made on him, and once even in the midst of dictating to his typewriter, his thoughts kept turning to that far-away island in the Southern seas, where Tusitala's road gleams white under the tropic sun. He had met Robert Louis Stevenson once, the tale-teller of Eugenia's story, and he well understood the influence of that noble life over the old chiefs who called him "brother."

The words that Eugenia had quoted in her letter rang in his ears all day, every way he turned: "*Fame dies and honours perish, but loving-kindness is immortal.*" He seemed to hear them when a poor woman came into his office, asking for a position for her son. They stopped the curt refusal on his lips, and caused him to take half an hour of his precious time to help her.

He heard them again when a case was reported to him of a man living in one of his tenement-houses,

who could not pay his rent because he was too ill to work, and could not hope to recover in his present surroundings. The stifling heat of the crowded tenement was killing him. In his weakened condition he was slowly sinking under his burden of debt and worry, and the thought that his helpless family was almost starving and would be left uncared for when he died.

Mr. Forbes turned away with an impatient frown from his collector's report, but that voice from far Samoa seemed to speak again. It was Tusitala's, and again he saw the road dug to last for ever, in the white light of the tropic skies. He sat with his head on his hand a moment, and then, slowly reaching for his check-book filled out a blank, signed it, and sealed it in an envelope.

Pushing it toward his astonished collector, he said: "Here, Miller, take that down to Wiggins, and tell him I said to pick up himself and family, and go down to the seashore for a couple of weeks. It will put them all on their feet again to get out of that place into the salt air, and, wait a minute, Miller," — as the collector moved off, — "take him a receipt for two months' rent."

Miller walked away, speechless with astonishment, but he had found his tongue by the time he got back.

He went into the private office, hat in hand, and waited patiently until Mr. Forbes looked up.

"Well?"

"Wiggins says to tell you, sir, that he will write to you to-morrow, but if you'll excuse me, sir, for meddling in what is none of my business, I'd like you to know before then what a little heaven on earth you have made in that tenement-house. Wiggins was so weak he could hardly sit up, and he cried for pure joy, at the thought of getting away. He says he knows it will save his life. He kept wringing my hand, over and over, and saying, 'It isn't just the money and all that it will do for me in the way of unloading me of that debt and getting my strength back, but it's the kindness of it, Miller, the heavenly kindness of it! Doing all this for me as if he had been my brother!'"

"Thank you, Miller," said Mr. Forbes, waving him hastily aside and turning again to his letters. He seemed impatient, but there was a glow in his heart that made the world seem pleasanter all day.

On his way home he stopped at a jeweller's, and selected a little ring. It was only a simple twist of gold tied in a lover's knot, but inside he had them engrave the word, "*Tusitala,*" and ordered it sent to the hotel that evening.

Late that night it was brought up to his room, where he sat writing a letter to Eugenia. He had just finished the paragraph: "I am sending you by this mail a sort of talisman. Maybe the daily sight of it on your finger will be a helpful reminder of that noble life that shall never be forgotten, while the Road of the Loving Heart endures. It is so easy to forget to take time to be kind. I find it so in my daily rush of business. I shall carry your letter with me as a reminder. Tell your little friend Betty so. The ripple she started will circle farther than she ever dreamed."

"How queer for me to be saying anything like that to Eugenia," he thought. "How much she must have changed to be able to write me the letter she did." He opened the box and took out the little ring. As he turned it around on the tip of his finger, he remembered that it was almost time for her to be coming home. The house party would soon be at an end.

"Hardly worth while to send it to her," he thought. "She will be coming home so soon. When we are down at the seashore, I will give it to her."

The letter she had written him lay open on the table before him. That letter, blotted with penitent

tears, had brought a new tenderness into his heart for her. It had revealed a different Eugenia from the one he had been accustomed to thinking of as his little daughter. Somehow she seemed nearer and dearer than she had ever done before, and he wanted to take her in his arms and tell her so. The next instant the thought flashed across his mind, "Well, why not? This is the time I have arranged to take my vacation, and there is nothing to hinder my going down to Kentucky after her. Jack Sherman is always urging me to visit Locust, and I'll give the child a surprise. She dislikes to travel with only Eliot."

Eugenia knew nothing of the telegram her Cousin Elizabeth received next morning, so several days later she could hardly believe her eyes, when she saw her father spring out of the carriage in front of the house, and come bounding up the steps, between the white pillars of the vine-covered porch. Tall, handsome, smiling, he came toward her, his arms outstretched, and, after one amazed glance, she ran into them, crying, "Oh, papa! papa! I'm so glad!"

"I couldn't do without my little girl any longer," he said. "I had to come for her."

Mrs. Sherman came out just then with the warmest of welcomes, and Eugenia rushed up-stairs for

a moment, to tell Betty about her surprise and to hurry Joyce and Lloyd down to greet her father.

"I am going to begin all over again now," she said to herself, as she went up the stairs. "I'll be as good, and sweet to him as he deserves. I'll let him see how proud I am of him, too. It's queer, but somehow I really love him better since I have thought so much about Betty's Memory roads. Well, I shall certainly try my best from now on to leave a happy one behind for him."

He gave her the ring that night, the little golden lover's knot with the name of Tusitala engraved inside, to remind her always of the Road of the Loving Heart, that she might leave in the world after her. With her head on his shoulder and his arm around her, they talked long, and freely together, as they had never done before.

Once he looked at her with a quizzical little smile. "I never realised until to-night," he said, "how old you are, or how companionable you can be. But we'll always be good chums after this, won't we?"

"Yes," she answered, giving his ear a playful tweak, and mischievously imitating his tone and manner. "And I never realised until to-night how

young you are, or how companionable *you* can be. I believe that if you'd been at this house party from the beginning, you'd have been playing with us by this time, like Bobby and the other boys.

"I must show this ring to the girls," she said, presently, when they heard Mrs. Sherman coming back. Then she hesitated, her eyes sparkling with the pleasure of a sudden thought.

"Oh, papa, I'd like to give Lloyd and Joyce and Betty each a ring like mine, to help them remember, you know, and as a souvenir of the house party. Don't you think that would be nice? I have scarcely touched my allowance this month. Couldn't we go to the city to-morrow and get them?"

"Yes, I think so," answered her father. "We'll ask Cousin Elizabeth about the trains."

Early next morning Mr. Forbes and Eugenia went into the city on their little excursion, and scarcely had they gone when a telegram arrived from Mr. Sherman, saying he would be home on the noon train. The Little Colonel went dashing around the house, from one room to another, calling out the news in the greatest excitement.

"Have you heard it? Papa Jack's comin'! Grandfathah is goin' to stay several weeks longah, but Papa Jack's comin' on the noon train to-day!"

Some one else came on that noon train, some one whom Doctor Fuller met in his buggy and took immediately up to Locust. It was the oculist who had been there before. Lloyd was so excited over her father's arrival that she scarcely noticed they were in the house, and she never knew when they gravely made their examination of Betty's eyes and as gravely went away again.

But late that afternoon, Eugenia and her father, driving up from the station, were surprised to see a cloud of dust whirling rapidly down the road toward them. As they came nearer they saw that Tarbaby was in the centre of it, and on his bare back perched the Little Colonel, the hot June sun beating down on her bare head and red face. As she came within calling distance, she waved her arms frantically to stop the carriage, and shrieked out, at the top of her voice: "Papa Jack's home, and, oh, Eugenia, *Betty can see!*"

The carriage stopped, and Eugenia leaned out eagerly.

"I couldn't wait for you to get home," cried the Little Colonel. "As soon as I heard the train whistle I jumped on Tarbaby without a saddle or anything, and just *toah* down heah to tell you. Of co'se she can't use her eyes much fo' a long time,

and will have to weah a shade fo' weeks, but when they tested her eyes she *saw!* And she isn't goin' to be blind!"

Eugenia gave a great, deep sigh of thankfulness, and leaned limply back in the carriage. "Oh, papa," she exclaimed, "you can't imagine what a relief it is to hear that! I felt so much to blame, that now it seems as if a great weight had been lifted off from me."

They were having a jubilee in Betty's room when Eugenia and her father reached the house. Mrs. Sherman told them so, from the head of the stairs and called them to come on up and join in it.

It was a very quiet jubilee. The doctor had insisted on that; but the unspoken joy of the little face on the pillow made happiness in every heart. It was the first time that Mr. Forbes had seen Betty. She was lying with her brown curls tossed back on the pillows, her eyes still bandaged; but the smile on the little mouth was one of the sweetest, gladdest things he had ever seen. Involuntarily he stooped and kissed her softly on the forehead.

"Who is it?" asked Betty, reaching out a wondering little hand, "Eugenia's father?"

"Lloyd calls me Cousin Carl," answered Mr. Forbes, taking the groping fingers in his, "and I

think that the little Betty that everybody is so fond of might call me that, too."

"I'll be glad to — Cousin Carl," said the child, bashfully, and that was the beginning of a warm and steadfast friendship.

Eugenia waited until later, when her father and Mrs. Sherman had left the room, before she opened her packages.

"Hold fast all I give you!" she exclamed, gaily, tossing a tiny white box into Joyce's lap and another into Lloyd's. But the third one she opened, and, taking out the ring it held, slipped it on Betty's finger.

"They are all like the one papa gave me," she said, "and have Tusitala's name inside to help me remember the Memory roads that Betty told us about."

"It will remind me of more than that," said Betty gratefully, when she and the girls had expressed their thanks in a chorus of delighted exclamations. "It will remind me of the happiest day in my life. This is the first ring I ever owned," she added, turning it proudly on her finger. "I wish I could see it." Then, with a gladness in her voice that thrilled her listeners, — "But I *shall* see it some day! Oh, girls, you couldn't know, you couldn't possibly imagine how much that means to me,

unless you'd been shut up as I have in this awful darkness."

There was silence for a moment, and then Eugenia stooped over and gave her a quick, impulsive kiss. "Well, your blindness did some good, Betty," she said, speaking hurriedly and with very red cheeks. "It made me see how hateful and selfish I've always been, and I'm never going to be so mean again to anybody as I was to you. I'm trying to dig a road like Tusitala's and I never would have thought of it, if it hadn't been for you."

With that she turned hastily, and, running across the hall to her own room, shut the door behind her with a bang.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEAST OF LANTERNS.

THE first week of July had come to an end, and with it came the end of the house party.

"Oh, deah," croaked the Little Colonel like a dismal raven, as she waited at the head of the stairs for the girls to finish dressing. "This is the la-st mawnin' we'll all go racin' down to breakfast togethah! I'm glad that Betty isn't goin' away for a while longah. If you all had to leave at the same time, it would be so lonesome that I couldn't stand it."

"I am glad, too," said Betty, groping her way slowly out of her room with a green shade over her eyes. Her long night was nearly over now, although it would be several months before she would be allowed to read. Her godmother had written to Mrs. Appleton, saying that she wanted to keep Betty with her until her eyes were stronger, and the child had clapped her hands with delight when she received permission to stay, never dreaming how

long it would be before she ever saw the Cuckoo's Nest again.

"This is the la-st time we'll ever ride together," sighed Joyce, as she mounted Calico after breakfast. "Oh, it has been such fun, Lloyd, and I've enjoyed this little clown pony more than I can ever tell. He is the dearest. ugliest little beast that ever wore a halter, and I'll never forget him as long as I live."

"And this is the last time we can go galloping out of this gate together, and see the boys coming up the road to meet us," cried Eugenia. "There they are, all three of them. Oh, they haven't heard the news yet! I'm going to dash on ahead and tell them."

Eugenia's news was that she was going abroad with her father in the fall. It had all been arranged since he came to Locust. Finding that business required one of the members of his firm to spend a month in England, he telegraphed back to the office that he would go.

"I don't know which is the most excited over the prospect, myself, or my maid," said Eugenia to the boys. "Poor old Eliot is simply wild with delight at the thought of seeing her home and family again, and I am nearly as much upset as she is. We're to be gone five or six months. Papa says that while we are over there we might as well go the rounds,

so maybe we'll spend Christmas in France, in the same place that Joyce did."

"What time do you leave Locust to-night?" asked Malcolm.

"On the ten o'clock train, I think. Joyce is going with us, part of the way, as papa has to make a trip to St. Louis before we go back to New York."

"And which way are you all going now?" asked Keith. The others had joined them, and the seven ponies were standing in a ring in the middle of the road, their noses almost touching.

"We're going down to your house," answerd Joyce, "to bid your Grandmother MacIntyre and Miss Allison good-bye. They have been so good to us all the time we have been here. Your Aunt Allison has done so much to entertain us, and as for your grandmother, I couldn't begin to tell you how she cheered us up when we had the measles. There was something from her every day, fruit and flowers and wine jellies and messages. One of my sweetest memories of Kentucky will be of your beautiful grandmother."

Instantly both the boys lifted their hats in acknowledgment, but Keith exclaimed in boyish impatience, "Oh, pshaw! I thought we were all going over to the mill this morning. The last time, you know. There's

no need of your going down to bid them good-bye when we'll see you at —"

But Lloyd stopped him with a finger on her lip and a threatening shake of her head. "Come on!" she cried, starting Tarbaby down the road at full gallop. "We can't stand heah in the road all day."

Keith dashed after her, laying a detaining hand on her bridle when he reached her side. "What's the matter, Miss Savage?" he asked. "What do you mean, by shaking your head at me in that way?"

"Can't you keep a secret?" she demanded, crossly. "You know well enough we want to surprise the girls to-night."

"Oh, I forgot!" he exclaimed, clapping a hand over his mouth.

"They are not to know a thing about it until time to light the lanterns," she said, severely. "And I think it would be very rude indeed for them not to make a good-bye call at yo' house this mawnin', even if you all are comin' up to-night."

"Oh, I say, Lloyd, leave a little piece of me, please ma'am," he begged, in a meek voice. "At least enough to help wind up the house party, to-night. Say you'll forgive me!" he insisted, clasping his hands together and looking at her cross-eyed, with

such a comical expression that she could not help laughing.

The last time! It's the last time! They said it as they stopped once more for the mail at the little post-office; as they turned regretfully homeward; as they went down the long avenue in the shade of the friendly old locusts. They said it again when they wandered four abreast, and arm in arm about the place, for a farewell glance at every nook and corner, where they had romped and played in the five weeks just gone. Even when the words were not wailed out disconsolately by one of them and echoed by the others, the thought that each thing they were doing was for the last time, went with them like a mournful undercurrent.

"Did you ever have a day fly by as fast as this one?" asked Joyce that afternoon, looking up from the trunk that Mom Beck was helping her to pack. "Here it is nearly six o'clock, and I haven't been down to the mulberry-tree. I wanted one more swing on the grape-vine swing before I dressed for dinner. It's like flying to go sailing through the air, across the ravine, on that grape-vine that covers the mulberry-tree."

"There won't be time now," said the Little Colonel, casting an anxious look toward the front

windows. If the girls had not been so busily occupied, they might have noticed how she had been manœuvring for some time to keep them away from the front windows. She even took them down the back stairs when they were ready for dinner, with the excuse that she wanted them to see the hamper in which Joyce's puppy was to travel. Eugenia's Bob was to be left at Locust until after she had made her trip abroad.

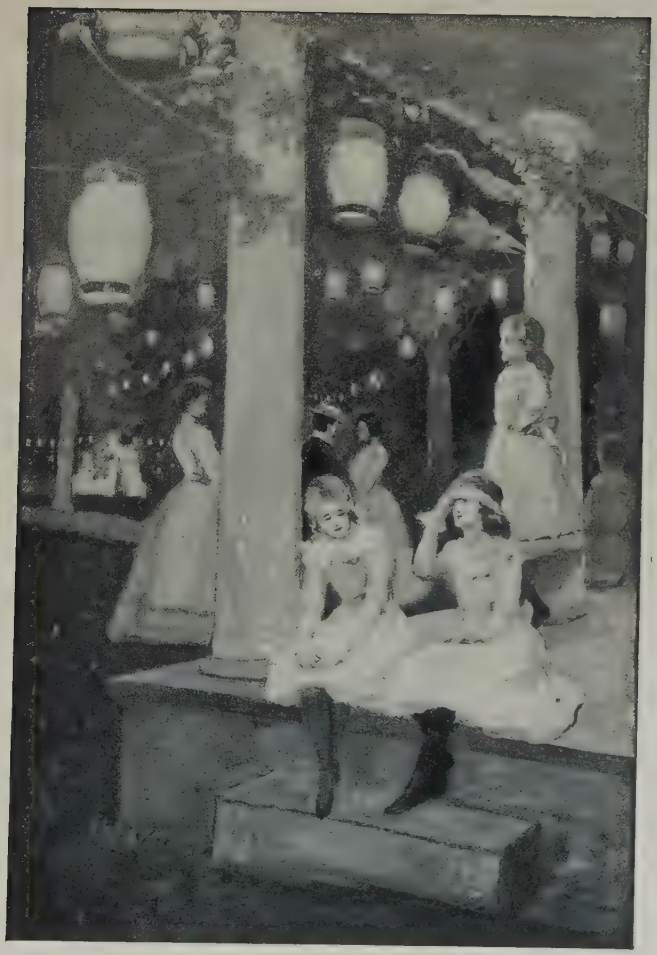
Joyce had a fresh blue satin ribbon packed away in her satchel to tie around her Bob's neck just before reaching home. "Oh, girls!" she exclaimed, "don't you know that those children are going to be delighted when this fat little dumpling comes rolling out of the hamper? They will all grab for him at once, and Mary will be so tickled she will squeal. She always does when she is excited, and it is *so* funny. I wish I could hear her do it this blessed minute. Somehow I can hardly wait to see them all now, although I don't want to leave Locust one bit. I have had *such* a good time!"

Mom Beck came out just then to tell them that dinner was waiting, and Lloyd hurried them through the back hall again, although she herself ran to the front door and looked out, before she took her seat at the table. It was a merry meal, for Papa Jack

told his best stories, and Cousin Carl, as they all called Mr. Forbes now, recalled his funniest jokes to make the children forget how near they had come to the parting hour. And when the dessert was brought on they sang a duet they had learned when schoolboys together, at which every one laughed until the tears stood in their eyes.

While they lingered at the table, Alec and Walker and Mom Beck, and all the servants on the place who could lend a hand, were turning the lawn into fairy-land. They had been busy for several hours putting up strings of lanterns, and now they were lighting them, row after row. Big lanterns, and little lanterns, round ones and square, of every size, colour, and shape, lit up the darkness of the summer night. Huge red dragons swung between the white, vine-covered pillars of the porch. Luminous fish and beasts and birds, hanging from the shrubs and trees on the lawn, set every bough a-twinkle, while all through the grass and all through the flower beds the flashing of hundreds of tiny fairy lamps made it seem as if the glow-worms were holding carnival.

There were tents pitched on the lawn and tables set out here and there, and every tent was brilliant with festoons of light and every table had a canopy



"'LET'S ALL SIT DOWN ON THE STEPS.'"

fringed with flaming balls of ruby and emerald and amber. But the most beautiful part of the whole dazzling scene was the old locust avenue, strung from top to bottom with lights. The trees seemed suddenly to have burst into bloom with stars, when all down that long arch, from entrance gate to mansion, shone the soft glow of a myriad welcoming lanterns.

"Let's all sit down on the steps and enjoy it before the people begin to come," said the Little Colonel, after the first burst of surprise and enthusiastic admiration was over.

"Everybody in the Valley will be heah in a little bit to say good-bye to you all, and we told 'em to come early, because your train leaves so soon."

Even as she spoke there was a sound of wheels turning in at the gate, and the band in the honeysuckle arbour began tuning their violins. It was not long before the place was gay with many voices, and people were streaming back and forth over the lawn and porches. Grown people as well as children were there. All who had been at the pillow-case party; all who had entertained the girls in any way, and all who had been friends of Betty's mother and Joyce's in their girlhood.

After awhile, when the guests were being served

with refreshments, under the lantern-hung canopies on the lawn, Mr. Forbes looked around for Betty. She was nowhere to be found at first, but presently he stumbled over her in a dark corner of the porch, with her shade pulled over her eyes.

"It's too bad you can't enjoy it like the rest of us," he said, sympathetically.

"I am enjoying it with all my heart, Cousin Carl," protested Betty. "I have raised my shade half a dozen times and taken a quick glance around, and the music is so sweet, and everybody comes up and says nice things to me. I would be perfectly happy if I didn't keep thinking that this is the last of our good times together, and in a little while I shall have to say good-bye to Eugenia and Joyce. You know I never knew any girls before," she added, confidentially, "and you can't imagine how much I have enjoyed them."

"Come, walk down to the gate with me," said Mr. Forbes, presently; "I have something to tell you." She lifted her shade an instant as they started down the long arch of light, and gave one quick glance down the entire way. "Isn't it glorious!" she exclaimed. "It looks as if it might be the road to the City of the Shining Ones!"

Then with a sigh she dropped her shade, and, slip-

ping her hand into his, let him lead her, as she walked along with closed eyes.

"You are an appreciative little puss," he said, smiling.

As they walked on under the glowing arch, hand in hand, he told her that he was coming back for her in the fall; that Eugenia wanted her to go abroad with them, and that he thought such an arrangement would be good for both the girls. Good for Eugenia, because otherwise she would often be left for days at a time with only Eliot for a companion, when he was away on business. Good for Betty, since she could be enjoying the advantages of travel at a time when she could not be using her eyes to study.

"You shall see Abbotsford," he said, "and Burns's country, and go to Shakespeare's home. And you shall coach among the English lakes where Wordsworth learned to write. Then there is Rome, on her seven hills, you know, and the canals of Venice and the Dutch windmills and the Black Forest. You shall hear the legends of all the historic rivers you cross and mountains you climb, and listen to the music of the Norwegian waterfalls. Don't you think it will help you to be a better tale-teller for the children, some day, my little 'Tusitala?'

"You see your godmother has been telling me

some of your secrets and showing me some of your poems and stories. What do you say, Betty? Will you go?"

"Will I go?" cried Betty, joyfully, holding his hand tight in both her own and pressing it lovingly to her cheek. "Oh, Cousin Carl! You might as well ask me if I would go to heaven if a big strong angel had come down on purpose to carry me up! Oh, *why* is everybody so good to me? I can't understand it."

They had reached the gate, and were turning to walk back to the house. Mr. Forbes laid his hand on the brown curly head with a fatherly touch.

"I'll tell you some day," he said, "when there is more time. It is all because of that road you discovered, little one, that Road of the Loving Heart. I don't wear a ring as Eugenia does, to remind me of it, but I've been carrying the inspiration of it in my memory, ever since she wrote me all that you had taught her about it."

They walked slowly back to the house together under the locusts that arched their star-blossomed boughs above them. The band was playing softly, and Betty, uplifted by the music, the lights, and the good fortune in store for her, could hardly believe that her feet were touching the earth. She seemed

to be floating along in some sort of dreamland. The old feeling swept over her that always came with the music of the harp. It was as if she were away off from everything, her head among the stars, and strange, beautiful thoughts that she had no words for danced on ahead like shining will-o'-the-wisps.

Joyce was the first to share her good fortune, and while she was telling it Eugenia came up with another joyful announcement.

"We are going to Tours," she cried, "and across the Loire to St. Symphorien, where Joyce stayed all winter. And we'll see the Gate of the Giant Scissors, and little Jules who lives there."

"I am so glad," said Joyce. "You must get Madame Greville to show you everything; the kiosk in the old garden where we had our Thanksgiving barbecue; the coach-house where we shut up the goats that day when they chewed the cushions of the pony-cart to pieces; and the room where we had the Christmas tree, and the laurel hedges in bloom — oh, I'm so glad you're going to see them all."

"What's that?" asked the Little Colonel, coming up behind them; and then Betty told her, too.

"Only think! Lloyd Sherman," she added, giving her a rapturous hug, "if it hadn't been for you it never

would have happened. It's all because you had this delightful house party and invited me to come."

"Here comes Mrs. MacIntyre," interrupted Joyce, in a low tone. "Did you ever see anything so fine and soft and fluffy as that beautiful white hair of hers? It looks like a crimped snow-drift. I wouldn't mind being a grandmother to-morrow if I could look like that."

She came up smiling, and beckoned the girls to follow her. "I want to show you something comical," she said. "I just discovered it." She led the way to the end of the porch, and there, standing in a row, were six little darkies, so black that their faces scarcely showed against the black background of the night. Only their rolling white eyeballs and gleaming teeth could be seen distinctly.

"They are Allison's protégés," she said. "Sylvia Gibbs's children, you know. They are always on the outskirts of all the festivities when they think they can pick up any crumbs in the way of refreshments. But they'll have some good excuse to give for coming, you may be sure."

"Oh, they are the children who acted the charades at the old mill picnic," said Eugenia, drawing nearer.

"Get them to talk if you can, Mrs. MacIntyre. Please do."

Except for a broader grin in token that they heard Mrs. MacIntyre's questions, they were as unresponsive as six little black kittens, and Keith, coming up just then, was sent to find Miss Allison. "They always talk for auntie," he said. "She is over in one of the tents, and I'll go get her."

Keith was right. Miss Allison proved the key that unlocked every little red tongue, and they answered her questions glibly.

"We don brought sumpin to Miss 'Genia," stammered Tildy, shyly. "M'haley, she got a chicken in dis yere box wot she gwine to give to Miss 'Genia to take away wid her on de kyars."

"A chicken!" repeated Miss Allison, laughing "What did M'haley bring Miss Eugenia a chicken for?"

"'Cause Miss 'Genia, she give M'haley her hat wid roses on it ovah to the ole mill picnic, when it fell in de spring an' got wet, and we brought her a chicken to take away on de kyars fo' a pet."

An old bandbox tied with brown twine was promptly hoisted up from the outer darkness into the light of the red dragon lanterns on the porch. The sides had been pricked with a nail to admit air, and the lid was cut in slits. Through these slits they could discover a half-grown chicken, cowering sleepily on the bottom

of the box. It was a mottled brown one, with its wing feathers growing awkwardly in the wrong direction.

"Imagine me carrying this into the Waldorf," laughed Eugenia, when she had expressed her thanks, and Mom Beck had been called to take the children away and give them cake and cream in the background.

"But you'll have to take it," said Miss Allison, "at least to the station, for you may be sure they'll be on hand to see you start, and their feelings would be sadly hurt if you didn't take it, at any rate out of their sight."

It was time for the leave-takings to begin. Joyce and Eugenia put on their hats, and Eliot hurried out with the satchels as the carriage drove up. At the last moment Mom Beck waylaid them in the hall with two huge bundles.

"I couldn't do nothin' else fo' you chillun," she said, as she offered them. "Ole Becky ain't got much to give but her blessin', but I can *cook* yit, and I done made you a big spice cake apiece, and icened it with icin' an inch thick."

The girls thanked her till her black face beamed, but they looked at each other ruefully when they were in the carriage.

"How I am ever to reach New York with a big

frosted cake in my arms is more than I know," said Eugenia. "I'll have to cut it up and pass it around on the train."

"But think of me," groaned Joyce. "I have my cake and Bob, too, and nobody to carry my satchel and umbrella."

The kissing and hand-shaking began, and a cross-fire of good-byes. "Give my love to your mother, Joyce." "Write to me first thing, Eugenia." "Good-bye, Betty." "Good-bye, Lloyd." "Keith and I won't make our adieux now; we'll follow you to the station and see you off on the train." "Good-bye! Good-bye, everybody!"

At last the carriage started on, but was brought to a halt by a shrill call from Rob. They looked back to see him standing on the porch beside the Little Colonel, who was excitedly waving a bunch of flowers which she had been carrying all evening. The light from the red lantern above her threw a rosy glow over the graceful little figure, the soft light hair, and smiling, upturned face. That is the picture they carried away with them.

"Wait!" she cried, a smile dimpling her cheeks, and shining with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "Wait! You've forgotten something! Eugenia's chicken!"

Little Jim Gibbs came running after them with it, and Mr. Forbes lifted it up beside the hamper that held Joyce's puppy.

"Oh, I've sat on my cake and mashed it," moaned Joyce, as she moved over to make a place for the dilapidated old bandbox. "How do you suppose we're ever going to get home with such a mixture of frosted cakes and puppies and chickens, and all the keepsakes that those boys piled on to us at the last moment."

It was amid much laughter that the carriage moved on again. Down the long avenue they went, under that glowing arch, spangled as if with stars, and every friendly old locust held up all its twinkling lanterns to light them on their way. Half-way down the path the band began to play "My Old Kentucky Home," and, leaning far out of the carriage, Eugenia and Joyce looked back once more to wave a loving good-bye to the Little Colonel.

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